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UNDER THE IRON FLAIL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

God's Prisoner
Rising Fortunes
A Princess of Vascovy
Our Lady of Deliverance
John of Gerisau

UNDER THE IRON FLAIL

BY

JOHN OXENHAM

AUTHOR OF "JOHN OF GERISAU," "GOD'S PRISONER"
"OUR LADY OF DELIVERANCE," ETC. ETC.

Time beats out all things with his iron flail,
Things great, things small;
With steady strokes that never fail,
With slow sure strokes of his iron flail,
Time beats out all.

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To
My wife

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Ma'm'selle Pinky Toes	1
II.	Her Friends and Otherwise	13
III.	Kerhuel and Querhoal	22
IV.	First Blood	28
V.	What the Château Held	37
VI.	Murderer! Murderer! Murderer!	45
VII.	I Get some Good Advice, but do not Act on It	54
VIII.	Physician, Heal Thyself	67
IX.	Hopes Postponed	82
X.	The Black Deed of Quercy	90
XI.	Shaded Lights	104
XII.	The Eagles' Gathering	109
XIII.	How we went to the Front, and came out the Back Way	117
XIV.	One from the Dead	130
XV.	What does it all Mean?	138
XVI.	Light! Light! More Light!	146
XVII.	Touch and Go	156
XVIII.	What Happened Underground	167

CHAPTER PAGE

XIX.—I Fall into Strange Good Company . . 177

XX.—The Shameful End of Querhoal . . 184

XXI.—A Human Tonic in a Wide-awake . . 193

XXII.—A Lost Shell 204

XXIII.—One Thing they did Better in America . 215

XXIV.—Monsieur Judas 224

XXV.—Black Fruit of Quercy 234

XXVI.—The Face of a Friend 243

XXVII.—A Dove in a Rookery 256

XXVIII.—Haste to the Wedding! 274

XXIX.—The Uninvited Guest 285

XXX.—French Leave in German Quarters. . 295

XXXI.—Three's Company, Four's None . . . 303

XXXII.—The Ghost on the Roof 314

XXXIII.—Hrats and Hrevolvers in the Cellar . 319

XXXIV.—Freda von Marcius 330

XXXV.—Rosemary 340

XXXVI.—Willow 343

XXXVII.—Slowly and Surely 352

XXXVIII.—The Swelling of the Red Flood . . 356

XXXIX.—In a Hot Corner 369

XL.—Several New Fathers 383

UNDER THE IRON FLAIL.

CHAPTER I.

MA'M'SELLE PINKY-TOES.

"KLOP—klop—klop—klop"; and the swirl and plunk of swift brown water under a dripping wheel; and the humming diapason of the whirling stones; and the floating mist of flour dust round the doorway, grey in the shade, and silver in the sun; and nearer at hand the sharper tinkle of green-white water-sickles over a slippery brown weir. I can see and hear it all to-day as clearly as I saw and heard it all that day, so very many years ago, when my eyes lighted on the old mill of Beauché for the very first time.

After my father's death—he was killed in a skirmish with the rebels on the Bhotanese frontier in the year 1866—my mother returned to the little half-English, wholly French, town of Dinan, in Brittany, where she had lived before she was married, and which held many sweet, old-time memories for her.

To me also, when I passed my first vacation there, the quaint, other-day flavour of the little walled town appealed very pleasantly. I spent many delightful days wandering over the surrounding country, among the apple orchards and the sleepy farms and crumbling châteaux, down the widening Rance towards the sea, and up the winding stream to the woods of Querhoal, and the mill of Beaujolrais, which the country folk long since shortened into Beauché, and to Kerhuel; and, once I had found Kerhuel, it became the Mecca of all my pilgrimages.

I had finished my course at Winchester, and was now pursuing my medical studies in London, with a view to

taking my degrees and in due course making a start in what appealed to me as the noblest of all professions. Meanwhile Dinan was home, since my mother's health, weakened somewhat by a long residence in India, could not stand the London climate. So I spent all my holidays in Brittany, and came to love both the country and the people—some of them very dearly.

That first time I ever set eyes on the old mill of Beauché is wrought deep into my memory, for it was the beginning of all things, and the chapter headed "Beauché" is the brightest chapter in my life, and of necessity, therefore, not without its darker lines. For light and shade follow one another in life as the sunshine and the shadows over the country side, and he who would escape dark days must e'en bury himself in a hole of one kind or another before his time, and live a life all neutral tints—a life not worth the living. For it is the lights and the darks that go to form the pattern in the web which without them would be nought but hodden-grey.

I had started out one August morning immediately after our early breakfast of café-au-lait and rolls and butter, and had wandered on and on along the river bank, till I saw that it would be impossible to return in time for second breakfast at mid-day. So I decided to bestow my slender patronage on the first roadside inn I came to and make the best of their faring, which experience told me would probably run to bread-soup, cold bacon, black bread, an excellent omelette, and as much thin acrid cyder as thoughts of the future would permit me to indulge in.

Then, among the woods on my left, I caught sight of the grey walls and turrets of a château, and I turned in among the trees for a nearer view.

And then a very strange thing happened, the exceeding strangeness of which, indeed, I did not fully understand till long afterwards.

I was approaching the still distant château through a wide, silent expanse, half park, half meadow-land. It was handsomely wooded and seemed wholly deserted. In

places the trees clustered so close as to form fair-sized forests. Through one such belt I was quietly strolling, when a strange sound brought me to a sudden stop and set me peering among the tree-trunks to see what had made it.

"Na-na!" That was what it sounded like, in a kind of tremulous whimper, not unlike that of a chidden child. It might be only a stray sheep, but the first impression it made on me was that it came from human lips.

I stood like a post, moving nothing but my eyes, and listening intently. The wind rustled the wide-spread limbs of the oaks around me. A continuous murmurous plash came softly from the direction of the river, and a droning hum, like that of a great bumble-bee. Nothing else—and I resumed my walk. A stick snapped sharply on my left, and I stopped instantly.

"Hello!" I cried, but there was no reply, and I went on again.

"It is a stray sheep caught in the thicket," I said to myself, but nevertheless I felt an odd sense of discomfort which all the sheep in the world could not have occasioned. It seemed to me that I was being stalked by some person or thing. I was undoubtedly trespassing on private property.

"Na-na!" came the plaintive bleat from behind the thicket on my left, and I turned quickly and walked round it, and came upon the strangest figure I had ever set eyes on. A man—undoubtedly a man—at all events the remains of one—bent almost double, with his front paws on the ground like a baboon, a pathetically vacant face covered with a tangle of grey hairs, which lay also in a mat on his shoulders and bristled through the rags about his chest, dark eyes which snapped angrily at sight of me, loose moist lips which shook out another tremulous "Na-na!" as I stood, quite as much startled at sight of him as he at me. That was what I saw.

Before I had recovered from my surprise, however, he had seen something else, and I had dropped out of his ken.

His quick-glancing eyes settled on something beyond

me. He rose absorbedly from his crouching, and glared at that something as the caged hyæna peers past the crowd at sight of his approaching chunk of meat.

While I was still in doubt as to the safety of turning to see what he was looking at, he leaped past me with a swift, stealthy bound, and I turned to watch what he was after. Away among the tree boles a dark figure, in a flat, broad-brimmed hat and a long straight coat that reached to the ground, was walking rapidly towards the château with his back turned to me, turned also towards the uncouth, yellow-grey figure that was bounding noiselessly towards him.

Before I could shout a warning the priest turned into a cross alley among the trees. I ran after the pair of them, but before I got half-way both pursuer and pursued had disappeared. When I reached the corner no one was in sight. From another cross path there came a sudden outbreak, a shout, a shot, and through the tree trunks I saw what had happened. My maniac had evidently sprung upon the priest from behind, and borne him to the ground. The assault had been witnessed by a third party, in the person of a young man in shooting costume, who had run up and discharged his gun, whether at the madman or only for the purpose of frightening him I could not say. At the present moment he was hammering him on the head with his gun barrel, while the priest, swearing volubly, was gathering himself up from the ground, and smoothing and dusting his ruffled plumes. Then they both grabbed the third party by the neck and arms, and hauled him along towards the château. It seemed to me that I was not needed, that, indeed, a stranger might be regarded as somewhat of an intruder at the moment, so I turned and struck back towards the river, wondering not a little what it all meant.

I came out on the river bank, just opposite the old mill of Beauché, and as soon as my eyes fell on it, and I felt the hum of the whirling stones, and heard the plashing of the great wheel, and the tinkle of the long curving weir, I knew that I had gone far enough, and so I lay down flat on my stomach in the long grass to enjoy it all. Then I saw just

beyond me a clump of blackberry bushes laden with fruit as big as my thumb, and I rolled lazily over and took tribute of them.

Above the mill, on a flat ledge of the opposite hillside, stood a château: a long, grey, two-storied front, with a candle-snuffer turret at each end, and a big arched entrance door in the middle.

I had disposed of all the blackberries within easy reach, and was sleepily wondering whether the pleasure of eating more would compensate for the trouble of rising and picking, when the door of the château opened suddenly, and two boys of about my own age and a girl, who might be somewhat younger, came out laughing merrily. They joined hands and came down the road with a rush which ended in shrieks of laughter, as the young lady was carried almost off her feet in the final gallop. Behind them toiled a dog with a very long brown body and very short legs, who ran with his nose to the ground and emitted an occasional discontented yelp at the way he was being outpaced.

"Now, Marie, go into the mill till we're in the water," cried the bigger of the two boys peremptorily.

"Shout when you're in," cried the girl, and disappeared through the floating cloud of dust into the doorway of the mill.

Then the others, laughing and joking, tore off their things, two white bodies gleamed in the sunshine for a moment as they cautiously paced the narrow brown ledge where the water fell over in curving sickles of green and white, and two simultaneous plunges told that the bathers were in. They broke into a simultaneous bellow as their heads came up, and the girl came out of the dusty doorway and sat down in the grass by the river side, and the panting brown dog scrambled clumsily into her lap.

The bathers frolicked and dived and raced like a pair of white seals. They were evidently very much at home in the water. The broad one with the powerful arms was called Jean, I perceived. He won every race, and could stop under water ten seconds longer than the other, whose

name I learned was George, and the girl, as I already knew, was Marie.

After watching them for a time, and looking as if she would very much like to join them, she got up, saying:

"Say, then, my children, I'm going across to get some blackberries."

"One does not eat blackberries," said Jean dogmatically.

"Pouff! I do. They're good. That's the advantage of being Protestant, see you."

"You can't get across, anyhow," said George.

"Can't I, then? I'll show you." And she whipped off shoes and stockings in a trice, held up her skirts daintily, and tripped onto the weir. She made a delightful picture, standing there with her little white feet in the solid white-laced green where the water curved to its fall.

"Have care, Marie!" cried Jean. And they both stood to watch her progress.

She set off bravely. The weir head seemed about a foot wide, but it was smooth and slippery, and the running water added an element of treachery. A slip on one side would mean a ducking, and on the other possibly a broken ankle and some bruises. The bathers swam alongside, and alternately encouraged and reprimanded her. Then the younger one, George, cried teasingly:

"Oh, what pretty little pink toes!" And she kicked the water into his face, and shrieked as she almost lost her balance.

"Don't be a fool, George," said his brother, "you'll have her in, and if you do, I'll lick you."

She got across safely, and landed with a skip and a clap of the hands and a triumphant, "Voilà! my little ones."

The forsaken dog whined and yelped at the other end of the weir, and made as though to follow her, then decided that the water was too deep for his short legs, and threw up his head and howled in a deep bell-like voice, which was out of all proportion to his size.

"Control yourself, my child!" cried the girl to the dog, who only howled the louder.

"Shut up, infidel, pagan, heretic!" cried George.

Then the girl came straight for my hiding-place, talking back volubly over her shoulder at the boys.

"Ah, but they are good!" she cried rapturously, before ever she had tasted one. "You miss a treat, you two. They are as big as—Mon Dieu!" This last at sight of me.

I took off my cap and sat up, and pieced out in my limping French, with a very red face: "I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle. I had no intention of intruding, but——" I would have liked to say it was such a charming sight that it wasn't in human nature to forego it, but the words did not come easily.

"You are English?" she said, speaking in English herself, with a considerable accent but no diffidence, rather with the air of a child proud of its accomplishments.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," I said, much more at my ease.

"And you saw me cross the river?" she asked, looking very straight at me out of a pair of very fine dark eyes, while a slight wave of colour flashed over her face and made it even more charming than before.

"I could not help it," I said humbly, and then, plucking up courage from the dancing eyes, "but I really couldn't say I'm sorry, Ma'm'selle. It was such a very pretty sight."

"Dieu-de-dieu!" came from the water. "Are you talking to yourself up there, then, Marie? Have those blackberries got into your head, little heretic?"

"What is your name, Monsieur?" she asked quickly, with a mischievous sparkle.

"My name is Charles Glyn, Mademoiselle."

"Be quiet, you two down there. I am talking to Monsieur Charles Gleen!" she said, looking over her shoulder for a moment.

"She's gone mad," said the younger brother. "Sunstroke! We ought to dip her head in the water."

"Will you oblige me to stand up one moment, Monsieur?" she said. And I obediently stood up. Even so soon as that I found a novel pleasure in doing what she asked.

"Voilà Monsieur Gleen, you two down there! Now you can go on with your play. For me, I am occupied."

"Diable!" said the bathers in one breath, as they stood staring.

"Who is it, and how did she know he was there?" said the elder brother. "Marie," in a tone of command, "come here!"

"All in good time, my little Jean," she said airily. "For the moment I am busy. Amuse yourselves, my children." And she helped herself to some of the ripe berries.

"If you don't come at once, I'll come and fetch you," cried Jean.

"Oh, fie! naughty boy!" she said, with a shake of her reddened finger.

I felt myself in an awkward position, and strove, against my inclinations, to get out of it.

"I'm afraid I'm making trouble, Mademoiselle," I said. "I really did not mean to. If you will permit me, I will retire."

"As you please, Monsieur," she said, with a sudden frostiness; "but there is no need to on account of Jean."

"Then, if you will permit, Mademoiselle, I will stay," I said, and she broke into a rippling laugh.

"I really think you had better go," she said. "Jean is getting his things on."

"Since I have your permission, I am going to stop if there were twenty Jeans."

By this time Jean had got on his shirt and trousers, and, with the latter tucked up, was coming across the weir with much determination in his face, while the younger brother was struggling into his things to come after him.

"Eh bien, Monsieur?" said Jean, as he came striding up the slope.

"Eh bien, Monsieur?" I replied.

"What do you want here?"

"Blackberries," I said.

"And who gave you permission to speak to my sister?"

"Le bon Dieu," I replied, which happened to be the first thing that came into my head.

Mademoiselle clapped her hands delightedly. "It is well said!" she cried in French. "Jean, don't be silly. Monsieur has as good right here as you have."

"He hasn't as good a right to talk to you as I have, anyhow," said Jean, "and I won't allow it."

"Pouff!" said Mademoiselle. "One would think I was three years old."

"So you are sometimes," said Jean, with brotherly brusqueness.

"Thanks, Mr. Brother," she said in English, with a saucy *moue*.

"Don't talk English to me, you little cat," he growled. "French is quite good enough."

"I am very sorry——" I began, feeling that I was really raising strife in the family.

"You'll be sorrier soon," said Jean, and flipped me on the cheek with his hand.

"Jean!" cried the girl, with sudden heat. "You are a brute!"

"Run away home, little one. This gentleman and I will settle matters ourselves."

"When you please," I said, forgetting all about the girl for the moment.

"Now, Monsieur," he said roughly, squaring up to me with his fists. The other brother had come up the slope. He sat down now, expectantly hopeful of entertainment. Mademoiselle Marie flung herself down on the grass and hid her face in it, and across the river the brown dog lifted up his voice and wept.

"Suppose we take the level ground," I said, "and then I'll knock spots off you."

"Certainly," said Jean in French, from which I gathered that he understood English, though he declined to speak it.

He was very broad and strong, and had a good-natured, determined face, though it was lowering just now. He was

as nearly as possible my own height, but, I judged, very much stronger than myself, and if he knew how to use his fists I did not look for a very happy time of it.

I saw in two minutes, however, that his knowledge of boxing was very limited, and I had no difficulty in warding his blows and keeping him at bay. He perceived this also, and it made him very angry. With his great strength, if he had been able to reach me, I should have been black and blue in no time. As it was, my guard arm was getting sore with his pounding, but otherwise I had not suffered.

Now, as everyone knows, the one thing not to do in boxing is to lose one's temper. But French boys are not built quite the same as English boys, and Master Jean, getting very angry indeed, made a furious rush, with the intention of annihilating me at one fell stroke, and, as I stepped aside, my fist slipped in, very neatly as I thought, on the bottom of his left jaw-bone. It made his teeth rattle, I'll be bound, and it upset him bodily, and before I knew it he had gone headlong into the water, while a scream of rage burst forth from brother George.

I had not known we were so close, and, forgetting what a clever swimmer he was, I instinctively jumped in after him. He was already making for the bank, and opened his eyes wide at sight of me alongside him in the water.

"Hello!" he said. "Did you tumble in too?"

"I tumbled in after you."

"I'm all right," he said, as we both scrambled out. "You're wet."

"I'm not any wetter than you," I said.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Dinan."

"You'd better come up to the house and get dry. You can't go home like that. And, besides, I want to ask you some things."

So we set off across the weir, Jean leading, I next, then Mademoiselle, who had not spoken since the fight began, and George brought up the rear to keep his sister from tumbling in. The brown dog received us on the other side with cumbrous gambols and yelps of delight.

"Poor old man! Did he think he was forgotten?" said Marie, fondling him.

"What is his name?" I asked politely, by way of saying something.

"His name is Bar," she said.

"Bar! That is surely an odd name. What does it mean?"

"It means *that!*" she said, pointing to the long brown body with the twisted legs and massive head and flopping ears and overhanging dewlaps. "Just that, nothing else."

We climbed the road to the château, and were met at the front door by a dark-haired, bright-faced lady, with a manner at once pleasant and commanding. Her face struck me as unusually beautiful. It was very like Mlle. Marie's, only older, and I now know that what made my eyes rest so contentedly on it was a great tenderness which seemed to underlie its more outward aspect, and in some indefinable way conveyed an impression of peace attained through storm and strife. There were lines in the unruffled brow, but they were not of recent date, and I saw that the dark hair was not without its silvery threads.

"Well, children, what has happened now?" she asked briskly.

"We fell into the water," grunted Jean, "this gentleman and I, and we've come to get dried."

"Come in, then," and she led the way into the large front room. "And you, Marie, ma petite, have you been in too?"

"No, maman," said the girl meekly.

"Run then, little one, and get dry things for these two wet ones. Some of Jean's things. Lay them on his bed. You are both about a size," she said, looking at us. "And what were you doing to fall into the water?"

"Just fighting," said Jean, as if that was his usual avocation.

"Ta, ta! Fighting! That is not gentil. Can't you live in peace till you have to fight properly? And that will come soon enough, maybe. I am quite sure it was you

began it, Jean. This gentleman does not look blood-thirsty."

"We had a difference of opinion, and I struck him," said Jean, "but he boxes better than I do, and I want him to give me some points. He's English, you see, and the English can box."

"Ah, Monsieur is English?" said Madame, with a quick smile. "I have many good friends in Dinan among the English there. You are from Dinan, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Madame. I live there with my mother."

"I wonder if I know her. What is your name, Monsieur?"

"Charles Glyn, Madame."

"Gleen, Gleen," she said thoughtfully. "No, I think not. You are not long there, perhaps?"

"My mother used to live there before she was married. When my father died—he was a soldier in India—she came back to live there again."

"And what was her name before she married?"

"MacLeod. Her father was Colonel MacLeod."

"Kittie MacLeod! But certainly, I knew her well. We were good friends. We were at school at Ker Nevan together. That is delightful. Will you tell her from me that Anna Destournelles will rejoice to meet her again. She will know me by that name, though I am now Madame de Kerhuel, and, like herself, a widow. Have you brothers and sisters, Monsieur Charles?"

"No, Madame, I am the only one."

"Ah, I have three wild ones and one sober one, though he was my husband's, not mine. But he is bon garçon. Here you are, Marie. Now, you two, run up and change at once, and I will have your things dried at the kitchen fire, Monsieur Charles."

"I thank you, Madame." And the two boys galloped up the dark oak staircase, to show me the way.

CHAPTER II.

HER FRIENDS AND OTHERWISE.

It was a wonderful room, Jean de Kerhuel's. Every available foot of wall space bore some trophy of the chase or treasure trove of the woods. Stuffed birds and animals, eggs galore, bows and arrows, a couple of very old guns, a pair of ancient pistols and a rusty cavalry sword, and a few coloured prints of wilder hunting scenes than any Brittany afforded.

George squatted on the bed while Jean and I disrobed and began getting into his dry things, Jean questioning me all the time on points militant.

"Do you fight much in England?"

"No, but we box a good deal in the gymnasium. We had a mulatto as assistant boxing-teacher, and he was a tremendous slogger. He used to knock us about like nine-pins, but it was first-rate training. If you went through his hands you knew how to take care of yourself when you'd got through. He flattened my nose all over my face one time. It's never got quite right since."

"Did you kill him?" asked George from the bed.

"Kill him! No, why should I kill him? It was part of the game. Anyone who stood up to Black Sam knew what he had to expect."

"Let's have another set-to," suggested Jean, with nothing on but his trousers. "And you shall show me how to whip you. I'm stronger than you are."

"You're stronger, but you're heavier, and you need practice. I'll tell you what. I've got boxing gloves at home. They're old ones, but they'll do. I'll bring them over some day, and then we can fight all we want without any damage."

"To-morrow?" said Jean.

"I don't mind."

Jean's impatience to learn, however, could not wait till

the morrow, and presently, when we had both got into his dry shirts and trousers, he was dancing round me on his bare feet, and sparring away with his open hands, and there was nothing for it but to take his flicks on the cheek and his digs in the stomach or else to give him another lesson at once.

We were still dancing about, feinting and warding, when there came a tap on the door, and Marie's voice outside:

"Dites donc, are you ready, you two?"

"No!" roared the brothers.

"Be quick, then. Mother wants you downstairs. Your Father Lesieur is here."

"Boh!" said Jean, with a jerk of the under jaw, and added something below his breath which, unless I was very much mistaken, would have freely translated into "Hang Père Lesieur!"

George, however, scrambled off the bed and began to arrange himself, and Jean, after hanging in the wind for a moment with a mutinous face, sulkily did the same. Then we all went downstairs.

Madame was in the front room in company with a big, stout, jovial-looking priest in a long black coat which reached to his feet. It buttoned up the front with innumerable little buttons, and from its length and close fitting imparted an air of sinuosity even to his well-fed figure. His full round face ended in a series of chins, and had a kind of pinky bloom upon it which told of plentiful living. Whenever he laughed, which was mostly all the time, it creased up into many fat folds. His voice was smooth and deep. Marie sat silently in a corner of the room. The old brown dog lay curled up by the fire. Every now and again a growl started somewhere in his long body, and rumbled slowly up through his throat, and came out in a low, snuffling "Whuff!" and I saw by the wrinkling of his brows that the red-brown eyes were wide open and fixed watchfully on the priest, whom he did not seem to approve of.

"Well, my little ones," rolled out the deep voice, as we

entered, "Mamma tells me you have been waging the eternal war, la belle France against perfidious Albion. How goes it, Monsieur Gleen? I heard of your arrival in Dinan."

I murmured my thanks for his enquiry, and stated that I was very well, and he held Jean and George by the hand, and laughingly questioned them about the fight. Jean growled out his replies, and did not seem to enjoy himself. George, on the other hand, answered blithely, and seemed on the best of terms with his spiritual father.

Suddenly Madame jumped up with an exclamation.

"Tiens! But it is strange that you should both choose the same day to come here. Run, my little one," to Marie, "it is M. Renel." And to the priest, "No controversies, M. le Curé, if you please."

"But no, Madame," he laughed back. "We are good friends, I and the good M. Renel. I find the little pastor very amiable, though not too lively as a companion."

I fancied a slight look of embarrassment, perhaps of regret at the awkwardness of the meeting, on the face of the new comer as he entered the room in company with Marie, and Marie's face showed something of the same.

M. Renel looked thin and meagre beside the burly priest. In fact they were in figure about in the proportions of their respective churches. His face looked as though he had had a sharp walk through frosty air, and was starting a bad cold. But the day was warm, and I never saw the good little pastor without that same pinched look on his face, and he always wore the same slightly deferential air with which he greeted first Madame, and then M. Lesieur, and then the two boys. An air which, as he spoke to the priest, somehow interpreted itself to my mind as saying, "Pardon, Monsieur, I am, I know, permitted to exist on sufferance. I will not interfere with your prerogatives in any shape or form. I will be good and keep strictly within the lines defined by the law and your church."

"Eh bien, M. Renel!" said the priest jovially. "You are happily arrived—just in time to checkmate me in any attempts I may make on Madame and Ma'm'selle."

"But, M. le Curé, I had no slightest idea you were here. You did not come, I think, direct from Dinan, or I must have seen you on the road."

"In which case you would have turned back, is it not so?" laughed the priest.

"Well, perhaps," said the pastor.

"But you are right, my dear sir. I was on my way to the Château, and when I saw one of the lambs—Tiens! Jean, mon gars, is it lamb or goat?"

"Goat," growled Jean, lurching uncomfortably in the warm grip of the fat white hand.

"Eh, bien, one of the goats of my flock knocked into the river by the hand of heretical England——"

"Comment! You saw it, M. le Curé?" exclaimed both the boys.

"But yes, I saw it all, my children. I was watching your enjoyment. I saw the pretty pink toes," he cast a merry glance at Marie, who blushed and looked vexed, "trip across the weir. I saw the battle and the disaster. Then I came across——"

"Across the weir, Monsieur?" asked Marie, with a sparkle of the eye.

"No, my little one. I got the boat, and came to see if there were any ill results, since even the goats are dear to me."

M. Renel had turned towards me with quick friendliness when he heard I was an heretical Englishman, and Madame introduced us. "Monsieur Charles Gleen is the son of my old friend Kittie MacLeod, who was at Ker Nevan with me, M. Renel. M. Renel is the pastor of our Reformed church. M. Gleen," this with a dropping of the voice, lest the words should grate ungraciously on the unreformed ears beyond. "You must be friends."

And with M. Renel's warm grip of my hand he seemed to brisk up somewhat, as though he felt that with an Englishman he was on sure ground, and might allow himself to feel at home, and no longer an alien.

"You will both stop to eat with us, Messieurs?" asked

Madame, comprehending both churches in one hospitable smile.

"But no, Madame, I thank you," said the priest; "I am to breakfast with M. le Comte at the Château. I do not half like leaving M. Renel in sole possession of the spiritual field, and," he added with a knowing smile, "I know well that he will have the more excellent faring, but duty calls, and one lives but to obey."

"I promise not to poach on your preserves, M. le Curé," said M. Renel.

"It is understood," smiled the priest, and rose to make his farewells.

As he turned his back towards me, in shaking hands with Madame, a stain of earth on his fine black coat recalled to my mind the curious scene in which he had figured in the wood. When he happened to pass near old Bar, the long brown body shook with muffled thunder, and the priest, looking down at him, said jovially, "Ha, ha, old heretic! You have not improved one bit since the first day I knew you. I believe it is Ma'm'selle who sets you against Holy Church."

"Not at all, M. le Curé," said Marie sweetly. "It is his nature."

"A case of demoniacal possession," smiled the priest.

"Not at all," said Marie. "He belongs to the Reformed Church."

"If M. le Pasteur were not present I might hint at some connection between the two, but as I cannot wait to argue the points, I will refrain."

"M. le Comte is well?" asked Madame politely, as he shook her hand.

"He is as usual, Madame," said the priest drily, "and M. Raoul has come down to keep him company for a few days."

"Ah!" said Madame, and said no more.

That first meal I ever had in the Château of Kerhuel is a very distinct memory with me—the great oak-panelled room, with its diamond-leaded windows; the wide, open fire-

place, with its smouldering logs, which gave forth a pleasant pungent smell, and its bed of white hot ashes, in which the coffee-pot stood waiting; the carafes of amber cyder; the horse-collar loaves, crisply brown outside and honeycombed white within; the delicious dishes, beginning with a milk-like soup and ending with stewed prunes and cheese, with a number in between which were strange to me, but none the less enjoyable; Madame's cheerful rally of talk as she plied M. Renel and myself with good things more than we had comfortable capacity for; the gradual thawing, under these genial influences, of what was evidently M. Renel's habitual slight frostiness of reserve, until the apologetic primness of his earlier conversation developed, towards the end of the meal, into a loquacity which would no doubt have astonished M. le Curé; the bulldog pertinacity with which my friend Jean attacked his food, and his air of aloofness from everything priestly, whether of one church or the other; his brother's amusing air of constraint, as of one who dined perforce under the eye of the enemy, and the wary glances he shot at the representative of the alien church; and Madame's hearty enjoyment in ministering to the bodily welfare of one whose business in life it was to minister to souls rather than to bodies, and whose path was palpably not strewn with fatness. And as for Marie, I can see her at this moment as clearly as I saw her then. She had, I thought then, and think still, the sweetest face I have ever seen, full of life and laughter, which left it little time for repose; dark eyes dancing and gleaming with merry audacity, arching brows which spoke in unison with her lips, and a wealth of soft hair, like spun gold, which made a lovely frame to a very lovely picture. She chattered away gaily to M. Renel, to her mother, and to myself, over whom she assumed a kind of proprietary interest, which had the effect of removing any barriers of restraint and was much to my liking. It made me feel very much at home, and set me quite at my ease, in spite even of my perpetual blunders in speaking. Mademoiselle corrected these so promptly and prettily, and so greatly did I enjoy the process,

that I took to stumbling of set purpose now and again, for the mere pleasure of being put right by so charming a teacher. But the steady, dark eyes saw through me at once, and a rosy finger threatened me. "Monsieur Gleen, you are very, very ignorant, but you are not so ignorant as you pretend to be."

To which I replied in English, "I have learned more French to-day, Mademoiselle, than in all the rest of my life hitherto, and I never enjoyed learning anything half so much before."

And Ma'm'selle shook her head at me, and replied, "I do not think you are naturally stupid, but all young men are more or less silly."

I assured her I was the exception to that general rule, at which she shook her head again doubtfully, and proceeded to heap the good pastor's plate with delicacies, in spite of his protesting hands, overcoming all his natural scruples with a gentle, "But one must eat, dear sir, one must eat!" And forthwith set him an admirable example herself, without any finicking or false pretence.

"It always makes me hungry to see other people bathe," she said enjoyably.

"You're always hungry," said George.

"Eh bien! And why not, my little one? It is good to be hungry, and better still to have something to eat. All the same I am glad M. le Curé breakfasts at the Château. Pouff! ragout and omelette, and not too much of either. His business must have been urgent to suffer such mortification of the flesh."

"Marie!" said her mother, with a note of gentle warning.

"Oui, maman!" in momentary meekness from Mademoiselle, as she dropped the Curé and helped herself to a further supply of clotted cream and stewed plums.

Perhaps it was the presence of her own little pastor, who regarded her with such benevolent appreciation, together with the absence of M. le Curé, and perhaps, also, the unexpected arrival of the friendly foreigner and the quaint manner of his arrival, which tuned her to unusually high

spirits. Whatever it was, she was wholly and absolutely and irresistibly charming, and when I was not laughing with vast and novel enjoyment straight into her challenging dark eyes, I found myself watching her every word and action, as greedily as a hungry dog watches for crumbs from his master's table.

Jean, as I have said, applied himself stolidly to his food and spoke little. Possibly the merry phalanx of heresy in the persons of Madame and Mademoiselle, and M. Renel and myself, was too much for his orthodoxy. More possibly still, it was a lingering sense of discomfort in his left lower jaw which exerted the restraining influence. For Jean's manner to the Curé had not struck me as by any means overcharged with that filial dutifulness which Holy Church expects from her sons, and is so frequently disappointed of. Madame and M. Renel discussed many matters connected with their church in Dinan. Marie flashed perpetually in and out of their conversation with some gay remark which generally raised a smile from both, or a smile from the little pastor and a gentle reproof from her mother, by which time Ma'm'selle was intent upon other business connected with myself or George, whom she teased and provoked and reprimanded to her heart's delight. With Jean I noticed she took fewer liberties. She did, indeed, ask him one time if he was feeling very bad, but when he growled she forbore any further levity.

"Dites donc, mon gros, what is it you are angry at?" she asked sympathetically.

"I am not angry," growled Jean, "neither am I a chattering magpie. You talk enough for all the family, my child."

"Mon dieu! But life would be dull if one could not talk. I may not fight. I may not bathe——"

"Pinky toes!" said George.

"Ah, wicked one, you shall have no more cream."

"Did she not run across the weir prettily, Monsieur Gleen?" said George. "Like a little chicken holding up its little skirts to skip over a little puddle."

"Very well, my little one, you are not gentil. That means only one lump of sugar in your coffee."

"Ah, bah!" from George.

Then a question from M. Renel to Madame reminded me that there was another member of the family whose acquaintance I had not yet made.

"And M. Godefroi?" asked the pastor.

"He is at Rennes, endeavouring to arrange a contract with the troops there," said Madame.

It was well into the afternoon before M. Renel and I set out on our homeward journey, and Marie and her brothers accompanied us for a mile along the road.

"Present my compliments and remembrances to Madame Gleen, Monsieur Charles, and say I will give myself the pleasure of calling upon her within a day or two," were Madame's last words.

"Will you bring those gloves to-morrow, M. Charles?" were Jean's.

"Gloves? What gloves? You never wear gloves, mon gros," were Marie's.

And I promised to bring the gloves on the morrow.

CHAPTER III.

KERHUEL AND QUERHOAL.

We chatted pleasantly, M. Renel and I, as we tramped along the dusty road, across which the serried poplars were already flinging long shadows into the fields beyond. Sun and shade, sun and shade, as far as the eye could reach—the rungs of a mighty ladder, with the gleaming Rance on the right, and Dinan perched on its little hill far away in front.

The good faring, which I imagined I was not wrong in thinking unusually good faring for him, induced more talkativeness on the part of the little pastor than I should have expected. Though, indeed, I always found him friendly in the extreme to myself, and ready at all times to afford me every information in his power. He seemed, somehow, to feel himself on surer ground with me even than with his own people, and allowed his light to burn more freely.

He enquired about myself and my studies, compared English schools and French lycées, greatly to the detriment of the latter, and stated with vehemence his intention of sending his own little son to be educated in England if he could possibly contrive it. He was very frank and simple in his mention of the many difficulties which beset the path of a pastor of the Reformed Church. He excited my sympathy and drew my liking.

In turn I questioned him as to my new friends.

"There is another brother whom I have not yet seen?" I asked.

"Yes; M. Godefroi. He is the son of M. de Kerhuel's first wife. He attends to the mill and the estate. Madame comes of the Huguenot Destournelles from Poitou way. Her father is rich, and some day the little Marie and the boys will be rich too, though for the present, and that is until the old man dies, they have no more than enough. Madame had a good portion when she married, but M. de Kerhuel,

though he was good and amiable, was not a good man of affairs. All they have left is the mill and the small property of Kerhuel. The old man down in Poitou was none too well pleased, it is said, with his daughter marrying out of her own religion. He is very wealthy, but he is also somewhat narrow. The two things so often go together. It is not those who have most who are the most generous, M. Gleen. They miss their opportunities, which is a great pity. It is a great thing to be rich," he said with a sigh, "but the rich are not without their troubles too."

"Madame did not strike me as being burdened with many cares," I said.

"Madame is a very noble woman, and riches will not spoil her when they come. And the little Marie takes after her for all her lightness of heart. They are hearts of gold, both. I owe them much." And he compassed twenty rungs of the ladder before he spoke again. "Madame carries things with a stout heart—a truly Christian heart—trusting the good God to carry her through the future, as he has done through the past. She is too wise to meet troubles half-way, and yet," he said musingly, "every day brings the possibility of trouble nearer. You see, M. Gleen, it is a divided house, necessarily so. When Madame married M. de Kerhuel she insisted on keeping her own religion for herself and any daughters she might have. She was wise, for the hold of the priest is stronger on the women than on the men. So Marie is Protestant and her brothers belong to Rome, though, ma foi, Jean is no very complaisant son of the Church. That is the fear. So many of our men see through the priests, and despise their teachings, that they are like to grow up with no beliefs at all. With the little George it is different—at present. He is theirs, to make and mould as they will."

"But Ma'm'selle is free of them," I said.

"Ma'm'selle is free of them," and he nodded his head with wise foreboding, "but they will never let so promising a bird escape, if they can snare it by hook or by crook. And, Monsieur," and he dropped his voice to a cautious

whisper, lest the shivering poplars should tell tales, "they stick at nothing to gain their ends, these gentlemen of the black robe. The one you saw there to-day, M. Lesieur, he is very pleasant, very suave, very jovial—all that. But, all the same, he is a Jesuit, and to make sure of Mdlle. Marie and the money that will some day be hers, there is nothing that I can imagine that he would not do."

"But surely Mdlle. Marie is safe from him so long as she is Protestant. It seemed to me that Mademoiselle had a pretty decided mind of her own."

"Dieu merci, yes! But when her mother dies and she marries! If she should marry into the Church I would not answer for her. The pressure they can bring is sometimes terrible."

"But Madame married into the Church, and she has kept herself safe."

"Yes, truly, but it does not often happen so. And if one knew all, I think we should find that Madame passed through desperate times. But, truly, she is a woman in a thousand, and whether the little one would be as steadfast one cannot say. M. le Curé's great ambition is to marry her to this M. Raoul de Querhoal, of whom you heard mention. He is grandson of the old count up at the great Château there, and lieutenant in the army. The old man is an old roué—outwardly reformed, at all events, though, they do say—but one must needs be charitable. He is very bigoted, and very grasping—a miser, if ever there was one—grinding his tenants, and giving grudgingly to the Church just as little as he thinks will save his own soul. And the young man is a profligate of the worst, with two great desires in his life—to step into the old man's shoes and money as soon as may be, and to marry more money still, so that he may enjoy life to the fullest in his own way. Much as I love the little Marie, I would sooner read the funeral service over her than hear the bells ringing for her wedding with Raoul de Querhoal, or any man as little worthy of her."

"But how would the Church benefit, M. Renel," I asked, "by marrying Ma'm'selle to M. de Querhoal?"

"Ah, my friend, trust the Church to pick out plums if it has its finger in the pie."

"And is Madame aware of M. le Curé's hopes and schemes?"

"Quite aware of them. Ma'm'selle also. The eldest son, M. Godefroi, he approves. And George, when he grows up, he will approve also."

"And Jean?"

"Jean? I think not. In disposition Jean is more like an Englishman than a Frenchman, if you will permit me to say so, Monsieur. He is rough and uncontrollable at times, but he loves his mother and sister dearly, and he is very honest. I do not think he would agree to it, but I do not know what he could do to stop it."

"And do they know the character of the young man?"

"Yes, they know as much as most know, and that is bad enough, though there is probably much more behind. Poor little Marie, if she should ever fall into that young man's hands! A thousand times better dead."

After a little self-cogitation, as I tramped along by his side, I told M. Renel of my strange encounter in the grounds of the Château, and asked him if he knew what it all meant.

"That is a very strange story, Monsieur Gleen," he said, "and it confirms rumours I have heard from the country people from time to time. But what it means, or who it is they keep up there, I do not know. The peasants round here are so full of strange stories that one does not as a rule attach much importance to them. They are frightfully superstitious, and as for ghosts and suchlike things they are very children. Yes," he said musingly, "that was very curious. And you are quite sure it was M. le Curé?"

"Quite sure," I replied. And he remained very thoughtful all the way to Dinan.

At parting he said:

"If I may be permitted, Monsieur Gleen, I would suggest saying nothing of that matter to our friends at Beauché. It might only cause an uneasiness which is quite unnecessary."

I agreed that that was so, and assured him I had no intention of saying any more about it.

My mother was greatly delighted at thought of meeting her old friend again. She plied me with questions concerning every member of the family.

"Anna Destournelles was a very lovely girl," she said musingly, "and we were the best of friends. We corresponded for a time, but lost sight of one another when I went out to India. Is the girl pretty, Charlie?"

"Very pretty, and very lively, and altogether very jolly—dark eyes, brown hair, and the loveliest little pink toes."

"Good gracious, boy, how did you see her toes?"

The relation of my adventures gave her much amusement, and when she had done laughing over them she regarded me thoughtfully.

"Now, mother mine, don't you go making plans," I said warningly.

"Plans, Charlie? What do you mean?" she said, with a guilty blush.

"Oh, don't tell me. I know the meaning of that wise look in your eyes, Madame Mère. Marie de Kerhuel is the prettiest girl I have ever met, and the nicest, so far as I could judge by seeing her run across a weir with her bare feet, and eat a very good breakfast in very high spirits. And she is going to have a million francs or so sometime, and the Jesuits are going to marry her to a wicked Count——"

"Anna won't let them. She will never let her girl fall into the hands of the priests—unless she has changed very much since I knew her. She was Huguenot to the backbone."

"Yet she married outside."

"Ye—s," she admitted grudgingly. "I'm surprised at her doing such a thing."

"Probably she fell in love with M. de Kerhuel. There couldn't be a better reason."

"She ought to have known better."

"Ah, now we're getting into deep waters. Suppose we get back to dry land and a cup of tea—if you made it your-

self, motherling. If Mademoiselle Druot made it I don't want any." Joséphine Druot was the elderly female in a white cap, which blossomed into a coif of abnormal dimensions on a Sunday, who permitted my mother to assist her in the affairs of our small household. Her ideas on tea-making, however, were hopelessly homœopathic, and the results were very distressing to the English taste.

"I shall always make the tea myself in future," said my mother firmly, from which I gathered that there had been a passage of arms on the subject.

Marie de Kerhuel's piquant face haunted me pleasantly all night long and mingled with my dreams. It was the first face that had ever taken such liberties with me, for I had never been much of a girls' boy. In the whole course of my nineteen years I could not remember ever having found myself on such pleasant terms with so very pleasant a girl, and I awoke next morning with a very distinct desire that those delightful relations should continue.

Some of the details of her face were less clear than they had been the night before. That troubled me. I felt it my duty to polish up that mental vision with as little delay as possible. The general effect of the sparkling face was there right enough, but it changed so quickly with its varying emotions that it had become somewhat elusive in its rapid alternations. But no amount of golden haziness could change the infinite sweetness and beauty of the large dark eyes. I could feel them gazing at me through all the varying shimmer of the rest. I was grateful to Jean for the exactment of that promise which would afford me the opportunity of seeing them so soon again.

CHAPTER IV.

FIRST BLOOD.

I HAVE no doubt my mother smiled inwardly next morning when she asked me, over our coffee and milk, where I was going that day, and I answered:

"To Kerhuel."

"Oh!" said she, non-committally, and with an accent of surprise.

"To see Jean," I explained.

"Oh!" with more of a hidden meaning in the inflection.

"I promised—in fact, he made me promise—to take my boxing-gloves over and give him some lessons."

"Oh!" with full understanding, and nicely concealed appreciation.

And presently, to the surprise of the country folk whom I met, I was striding along towards Beauché with the big gloves strung over my shoulders like the spoils of a modern giant-killer. Many humorous remarks were passed upon me, but they immediately set me down as an Englishman, and that condoned anything and everything.

The two boys were sitting under a tree by the roadside on the look-out for me.

"Ah, v'là!" cried Jean. And came racing along towards me.

"George said you wouldn't come, but I knew you would. Are those the gloves? Come along up to my room, and we'll have a turn at once. We'll go in the back way, then no one will see us."

I did not myself see the necessity for so much concealment. In fact, I would very much have preferred it otherwise. But I could not very well say so; and we stole stealthily through the great kitchen, with its huge open fireplace and black *pot-au-feu*, and its garniture of shining pots and pans, and up the staircase, and reached Jean's

room without any beneficent encounter with the ladies of the family.

"Now, Monsieur Gleen!" said the bloodthirsty Jean, locking the door and peeling off his coat in one operation, so as to lose no time. "Allons!" And he slipped on a pair of the gloves and made up to me, while brother George perched himself up on the bed to enjoy the proceedings.

"Dieu!" from Jean. "What a fool one feels in them."

"Shake hands first," I said. "That is the root of the matter, my friend. That is a promise that you won't lose your temper. When you lose your temper you lose the fight —as you did yesterday," I added, by way of touching him up. But he did not need any spur of that kind, and in a moment we were dancing round on our toes, and before he knew it I had tapped him on the nose in a way that made his eyes water and then blaze.

"Gently!" I cried, as he came furiously at me. "If you can't keep cool, Jean, I'll first thrash you, and then I'll decline to fight any more."

"Sapristi! But you've broken my nose," he cried.

"It's all part of the game. Break mine if you can. I don't mind, so long as you keep your temper. If you strike with both fists at once, you—lay yourself open to—that kind of thing." And I got in again on his left jawbone, which, from the wince he gave, was probably still tender from yesterday's crack.

"Kick him, Jean," suggested George from the bed.

"We don't kick," I said.

"Little fool!" panted Jean, "it is the boxe we are at, not the savate."

"Ma foi! I'd kick his head off," squeaked George.

"I'll kick you out of the room if you don't shut up," growled Jean.

"Piff, paff! You daren't. If you did, I'd tell Godefroi about the gun."

"Little pig!" observed Jean.

"You're stronger than I am," I said, as we sat panting on the side of the bed, "but I'm lighter on the feet and more used to the work; but you'll soon get into it."

We had half a dozen rounds, with chats in between and explanations and demonstrations. Jean was not very quick in grasping a thing, but he had a dogged pertinacity which served him well. He slogged away till he got things right, and managed, with some little difficulty this first day, to keep his naturally hot temper under control. With each gentle tap I got in we became more friendly, however, and when he succeeded at last in planting one very neatly on my nose his *amour propre* was restored, and we were the best of friends.

Then there came a sudden tap on the door, and I heard Mademoiselle Marie's voice outside, "Jean, mon gars, what on earth are you doing inside there? Are you killing something, or stuffing something, or what? Open the door, old boy. If it smells very bad, open the window first, if you please."

Jean grinned a little painfully and flung open the door.

"Don't be rude, little one," he said. "It is not gentil to hint that my friends smell bad."

"Comment! Monsieur Gleen?" And the arched brows curved into semicircles of surprise as she came through the door. Bar was at her heels, as usual, and greeted me affably. "I did not know you were here. What are you all about? Dieu! What are those things? Gloves? Bon dieu! Do you wear those on Sunday, Monsieur? They are extremely comme-il-faut."

"They are boxing gloves," I said.

"Ah, you are as bad as Jean. Fighting, fighting! Why can't boys wait until they have to fight? The time will come quite soon enough."

"But this is only play, Ma'm'selle," I said. "It is good exercise, and teaches you many things."

"Allons! Show me!" she said, and settled herself on the side of the bed, with the long brown dog in her arms. So we fought one more round, which made both our eyes water and Ma'm'selle's eyes sparkle, especially when we shook hands and she saw there was no ill-feeling in the matter.

"That goes better," she cried, with a clap of the hand. "Yesterday it was horrible, because you hated one another. To-day it is all right, because you are friends."

"Ma—rie!" came Madame's voice up the staircase.

"Mon dieu!" cried Ma'm'selle, with another clap of the hands. "I came to tell you breakfast was ready. You will join us, Monsieur Gleen?"

"I'm afraid Madame will begin to look on me as intrusive," I began.

"Not at all. A visitor is always a godsend, unless it is M. le Curé, who comes from the—from Dinan. It makes the boys behave themselves so much better when someone is there."

"Merci, Ma'm'selle! And Ma'm'selle also," said Jean, as he dipped his head into the basin.

"I will tell M. le Curé how you adore him," said George.

"Tchutt, bébé! M. le Curé knows a great deal more than you can ever tell him. I will tell maman you are washing off the stains of conflict." And she tripped away downstairs with Bar pattering behind.

Madame de Kerhuel's greeting was hearty enough to remove any feeling of intrusion on my part. She asked instantly after my mother, and was greatly pleased when I told her how eagerly her old friend was looking forward to her promised visit.

"I too," said Madame warmly. "It is delightful to renew an old friendship, and your mother and I were very close friends indeed. Godefroi, this is M. Charles Glyn, the son of my very dear school friend Kittie MacLeod."

M. Godefroi shook hands with me and apologised for having already begun his breakfast. He was tall, dark, and considerably older than the others. In manner he was quiet and reserved.

"Someone is always late," he said. "Generally it is Ma'm'selle Marie——"

"Oh, Godefroi, what a fib!"

"——and as I am a man of business, I make a point of starting at the proper time, no matter who is absent.

Jean, my friend, have you been trying to improve the shape of your naturally beautiful nose?"

"Boxing," growled Jean, who objected to his nose being brought into such undue prominence. "Monsieur Gleen's is as bad."

"In that case it would not be polite to say any more about it," said Godefroi, and went on with his breakfast.

The meal was as delightful as the last one. More so, for Jean came out of his shell, especially after Godefroi had retired to his affairs, and showed that, far from harbouring any resentment for his yesterday's maltreatment, he was inclined to be very friendly with the stranger, and to look upon him as a good gift of the gods.

"We will go fishing," he said, as we rose from the table. "You fish, M. Charles?"

"Certainly. When I get the chance."

"I go too," said Marie quickly.

"You never catch anything," said Jean. "You only chatter, and when I pull the hooks out you scream."

"I always feel sorry for the poor things."

"But you eat them quick enough," said George.

"It is different. They do not look the same when they are cooked."

So presently we trooped down to the river side, where the sight of the green-white sickles curving over the weir recalled to my mind the twinkling white feet which tripped so daintily through them the day before.

With the steady "klop-klop" of the great wheel close in our ears, and the ceaseless hum of the grinding stones dominating every other sound, we scrambled into a big flat punt, and Jean took the pole and pushed us out into the smooth swift mill-race. Characteristically, he allowed us to drift down almost onto the weir, for the purpose of eliciting Marie's frantic shrieks and George's startled remonstrances. And when he was satisfied therewith he handed me another pole and we made our way steadily up stream, till we came to broad, silent pools and water-breaks, with the trees almost meeting overhead, and there we staked the

punt and proceeded to cast our lines. And Marie chattered and shrieked with laughter, which ran down to voluble commiseration whenever we caught anything; and George grumbled at his want of success, and Jean drew in his prey like clockwork and growled at the other two.

And I, if less successful as a fisherman, drew immense and novel enjoyment from them all, and marvelled delightedly at the changes which twenty-four short hours had wrought in our relative standing. For before we touched bank again it was "Jean, and George, and Charles, and Marie," with us all, and we were on as intimate a footing as if we had known one another all our lives. And I knew, beyond all possibility of questioning, that Marie de Kerhuel was the prettiest and sweetest and altogether the most charming girl in all the world. She was, for a time, just a trifle hesitant on the bare "Charles," as I was on the simple "Marie." But when she had, at sight of a fish on her line, twice on the instant dropped her rod as though it were red hot, and when twice, amid Jean's growls and her shrieks, I had caught her round the waist and prevented her tumbling overboard in her attempts to recover it, "Monsieur" and "Ma'm'selle" slipped into the water and went floating down-stream with the bubbles, and shot over the weir or under the big wheel, and went down the Rance and were lost in St. Malo Bay, for at present we had no further use for them.

When we had enough dim-eyed, silvery beauties lying about the punt to satisfy Jean, and to fill Marie with compassion and a stated desire to restore them to their native element, which evoked a brotherly threat to throw her over after them, Jean announced his intention of having a swim. He poled the boat ashore and peremptorily ordered Marie off into the woods.

"I shall come back and watch you," she said.

"We'll shout when we're ready," growled Jean. "What a nuisance girls are!" And Marie scrambled into the bank with shrieking asseverations that Jean had done his best to drop her into the water, and disappeared among the bushes.

We were in the water in a trice, and our shouts soon brought her back to sit on the bank and watch us longingly.

"I wish I could come too, Jean," she said.

"Oh, fie!" from George.

"I shall make myself a swimming suit such as the ladies wear at St. Malo. I don't see why not."

"You can't swim," said Jean.

"I can learn. You couldn't swim yourself once."

"We don't want any girls paddling about with us, do we, mon ami?"

"Yes," I said.

"Oh, bah! She would scream every time a snake got round her leg."

"Snakes! Oh!" And the longing face lengthened. "Jean, you're lying. I don't believe there are any snakes," she added, as she saw me laughing. "Are there any snakes, Charles?"

"I've not seen any yet," I said.

"Well, there are things that feel like snakes, and you'd scream just the same," said Jean, and fished up with his foot a long piece of creeper.

"I'll promise not to scream."

"Pooh! You'd choke if you didn't scream. Half your time is spent in screaming!"

"Rude!"

And then a shot rang out above our heads, and Marie gave a shriek as a wood pigeon fell with a thud almost at her feet and lay there writhing.

"Oh, cruel, cruel!" she cried, and picked up the wounded bird and tried to soothe it.

"Tiens! Who shoots there?" cried Jean angrily.

"I shoot, Monsieur!" And a very elegant young man stepped out from behind a tree, and stood looking at us with his hands on the muzzle of his gun. He was dressed in what I presume was the height of fashion for the chase: green shooting coat with a leather belt, knickerbocker trousers, long yellow laced boots, and a hat looped up at one side. His face and hair were dark, and his little black

moustache was carefully waxed into pin points. I hated him on sight.

"M. de Querhoal!" said Jean gruffly, as we stood up to our chests in the water looking at him.

"At your service."

"Here is your victim, Monsieur," said Marie, holding out the bird.

"An offering at the shrine of beauty, Ma'm'selle," he smiled.

The bird squirmed, and then drooped its head, and its blood trickled slowly through the girl's slim white fingers.

"Thank you," she said soberly. "I do not want it. It is dead."

"It is therefore become of some use in the world," said he.

"Poor little thing!" she said, and looked as if she would throw it into the water. "I am sorry you killed it, Monsieur." And she began scraping a hole in the soft soil. "I will bury it."

She completed the grave, smoothed the soft plumage, laid the warm body down, and covered it with grass, and heaped the soil up into a little mound on top of it, while M. de Querhoal watched her in amused silence.

"Sheer waste," he smiled down upon her.

"Yes," said Marie quietly, "that is so."

That was the first time I met Raoul de Querhoal. I have often thought since, in looking back over these old times, that the circumstances of that meeting were strangely typical of what followed. Our intercourse began with the shedding of innocent blood, it was marked by the shedding of innocent blood, it ended amid the roaring red floods of the great collapse, and the red stain was over it all.

Raoul stood there on the bank, gay and debonair, leaning on his gun and smiling down with critical appreciation on Marie, who sat gently patting the little grave which lay between them. It was natural, I suppose, that I should hate him, and I hated him with all my heart and soul. And nothing at that moment would have given me, standing

there with my feet in the mud and the water welling past my chest, greater satisfaction than to quench that boulevard smile of his by plucking his shapely legs from under him and sitting heavily on him under water. No such heroic measures were possible, however; and, after staring his fill of Marie, who was diligently binding two twigs into a cross with a piece of grass, as a headpiece for her grave, he informed us that we should catch cold if we stood too long in the water, and, raising his hat very gracefully, he bade us adieu, and shouldered his gun and went on his way.

"Pschutt!" said Marie.

"P'tit crêvé!" growled Jean.

"Isn't he fine?" said George.

"Puppy!" said I.

And even if Lieutenant Raoul had heard the consensus of adverse opinion I do not suppose it would have occasioned him one moment's annoyance. He was the kind of self-sufficient young man whose belief in himself far outweighed any opinions which the commonplace outsiders who constituted the rest of the world might have of him. But the insolent audacity of his smiling regard of Marie de Kerhuel rankled in my breast, and my instinctive dislike of the young man was strengthened by the fact that Marie shared it with me.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE CHÂTEAU HELD.

The following day Madame de Kerhuel and her daughter drove in state in the family carriage to pay their promised visit to my mother, and the expectation of their doing so kept me at home.

"My dearest Kittie!"

"Anna!" And the two ladies were on one another's necks like a couple of schoolgirls.

A novel, timid, delightful sensation within me informed me that a similar demonstration on the part of the second generation would be an unusually pleasant experience, but fortunately I succeeded in showing no signs of it.

"And this is your daughter, Anna? My dear," said my mother, as she kissed Marie warmly, "your face drops twenty years out of my life, and carries me back to the days when your mother was the loveliest girl at Ker Nevan and I was her very dear friend. They were very happy times, Anna."

"Very happy, my dear. But we have both had happier since. Is it not so?"

"Surely, and also sadder. And now we live over again in our children."

"Marie also has been at Ker Nevan," said Madame.

"Do the Demoiselles Jacquelicot still keep the school?" asked my mother.

"They still conduct it, and most admirably, though they are not as young as they were in our time."

"I thought Mdlle. Sophie was about getting married just at the time we were leaving."

"Ah, he died. The poor Sophie!" And then they drifted off into old-time reminiscences, and the second generation was left to its own devices.

I induced Marie to come to the back window, from which there was a lovely view over the Rance valley.

I asked her if she had completed the promised bathing suit, at which she coloured beautifully and laughed.

"But I shall make it," she said. "Why not? The gentlemen and ladies bathe together at Dinard and St. Malo. Why not at Beauché?"

"Certainly," I said stoutly. "Why not? It would be very jolly."

"When do you return to school in England, Monsieur Charles?" she asked, with mirth in her eyes, and a delightful assumption of prudishness in her manner.

"I go back about the middle of September. But it is to college I am going, not to school; college and the hospitals!"

"Horrors!" she said. "Hospitals sound horrid. I shall have my bathing suit ready for the day after the middle of September."

"That is too late. You will be catching cold if you bathe in the river then. It is delightful just now."

"Really? I thought you three looked awfully cold yesterday when you stood looking at the charming M. Raoul."

"Conceited puppy!" I said.

"I thought he looked extremely elegant, with his beautiful green coat, and his little pointed moustache, and his charming smile, and his——"

"His impudence and insolence. I'd like to have jerked him into the river and stamped on him."

"Well, that probably would have made a difference in his appearance. Jean does not seem to like him any more than you do. Now, George agrees with me that he is very elegant in appearance, and that his manners are most polished."

"I should think he would be an extremely nice man to know," I said, taking a leaf out of her own book. "The kind of fellow one would like to have for a friend. I shall make up to him, and try to get to know him better."

"Ah! Now you are not English. You are becoming acclimatised."

"How so, Ma'm'selle?"

"An Englishman says what he means."

"And a Frenchwoman?"

"Sometimes—not always."

"I will remember."

"It cuts both ways."

"Yes, I see it will complicate matters. I think the English style is much the best."

"Stick to it, Monsieur. It becomes you infinitely better than the other."

"If you will adopt it also, Ma'm'selle."

"And why, Monsieur?"

"Because——" Well, it was rather too soon to tell her why, and my explanation got no further.

"That is a woman's reason," she laughed. "A man, especially an Englishman, should have a reason for everything."

"And a woman?"

"Mon dieu! A woman does as she pleases, or what is the good of being a woman?" And then, with a sudden portentous gravity, which was nevertheless very charming in its incongruity, she added: "But very often she is a fool, and doesn't know why she does things."

I was cogitating an extremely sagacious answer to this when Joséphine Druot brought in the tea things, and burst out into a tornado of welcome of Madame and Mademoiselle, whom she had known nearly all their lives, having been servant at Ker Nevan when Madame was a girl there, and afterwards nurse for a time at Kerhuel. And as for Ma'm'selle, "la petite," as Joséphine called her, "Dieu-de-dieu! I had her in my arms when she was two days old, and, mon dieu! how she did talk, as merry as a cricket, though none but the good angels could understand a word she said. Dame! How it takes one back to the old days to see Ma'm'selle. She is as like Madame at that age as this year's rose is like the last. And the boys? Monsieur Jean, is he as big as ever? It must be nearly time for his service. Ah, in another year? C'est ça. It is painful to have them go, yes truly, but needs must when the time comes. And the little

George? Eighteen? Is it possible? Why, then, Ma'm'selle is absolutely a marvel for seventeen; as well developed as many a demoiselle of twenty, and prettier than any twenty of them all rolled into one." And so on, and so on, with the unbroken volubility of a paysanne of the Bretagne, and the reminiscent activity of an old family dependent.

The elders had scarce unravelled the outer fringe of their talk when it was time for the visitors to leave, as they had other calls to make in Dinan, and they carried with them our promise to go over to Beauché early the following day and remain for dinner.

"She is wonderfully sweet and pretty," said my mother musingly, as we sat together that evening.

"Madame de Kerhuel?" I began.

"Madame? No, Marie. Anna is good and charming as she always was, but I think Marie is even prettier than her mother was at her age."

"Why, you hardly spoke to her, mother. You two old ladies had so much to say to one another that we young ones could hardly get in a word."

"I was watching you," she said. "She has her mother's voice and eyes and manner. It was like hearing Anna talk in the little back school-room at Ker Nevan. I must call on the old ladies, and take you with me to show them what a well-grown English boy is like."

"That will be a great treat for the old ladies, as Ma'm'selle Marie would say." At which my mother smiled her own knowing little smile and said nothing.

Next day I chartered a pony-chaise from the proprietor of the hotel two doors lower down the street, and the early afternoon found us at Beauché.

Our respective mothers had still the mutual reminiscences of nearly twenty years to get through, and we younger ones found it perfectly agreeable to our feelings to leave them a fair field.

Jean brusquely suggested a scramble through the woods as a fit and proper way of spending the afternoon, since there was no need to go fishing on a Saturday, and they had

bathed already that morning. His manner carried with it the conviction that any dissent would earn nothing but his supreme contempt, without in any way affecting his personal proceedings. So, when Marie had with some difficulty exacted his consent to her taking Bar with us, on the ground that he was getting absolutely fat and needed more exercise, we fell in with his plan and crossed the river in the punt and plunged into the woods.

"I hope we shan't meet the little green man," said Marie.

"If we do, we'll call him names and throw stones at him," said Jean, who was in an extremely good humour at having coerced us all so easily to his wishes.

"Perhaps he'd shoot at us," said George apprehensively.

"Tchutt! One does not get shot for so small a thing as that in this country. Just let him try it on, and I'll punch his silly little head."

We heard no sound of Lieutenant Raoul as we pushed up into the higher woods, and Jean, in his humour, discoursed in a way that surprised me of the trees and their inhabitants, and showed—in a jerky, spasmodic kind of a way it is true, but without anything like a desire for self-display, rather as though it were forced out of him by the facts of the case—a wonderful understanding and a keen and loving appreciation of all that concerned them. It showed me quite a new phase of his character, that of the ardent lover and diligent student of nature.

"What I would like," he said, stretching out his arms one time, "would be to travel all over the whole earth wherever things are at their wildest and best: up the Amazon, into the middle of Borneo, anywhere and everywhere where Nature has things all her own way. Mon dieu! It must be heavenly!"

"It is generally also very unhealthy," I remarked.

"Oh, tcha! One dies when the time comes," he said, "and no amount of taking care will keep one alive one day longer."

We came in time on an opening in the woods, from which we looked right down on the great house of Querhoal.

"Tiens! There is M. le Curé," said George, as two figures, deep in conversation, came pacing slowly round the corner of the terrace which ran round the front and sides of the house.

"And the little green man," said Marie. "M. le Curé is hearing his confession, and giving him absolution for all his sins, past, present, and to come."

"He'll need it, I'll be bound," growled Jean.

The two below turned and paced slowly back, and disappeared round the front of the house.

"There's a bugaboo in that house," said Jean mysteriously.

"Why, what do you mean, Jean?" I asked, wondering if his bugaboo had anything in common with my wild man of the woods.

"A monster of the most frightful," said Jean. "He's in that corner room at the back, the one with the barred windows."

"Pooh! You're just trying to frighten us, Jean," said Marie, looking, nevertheless, somewhat scared.

"I've seen his face at the window. If you watch long enough, maybe you'll see it too."

"I don't want to see it," she said. "And I don't believe there is anything to see. Come on. Let us go home."

"Voyons! Wait a bit! See there!" as an old man issued from the stables behind the house carrying a great sheaf of straw on his shoulder.

"That's bugaboo's clean bed going in, and now watch. Mon dieu! I have seen it all many times. See the old miser go back to pick up the straws lest one should be wasted. Dear old man! That is our neighbour, M. le Comte de Querhoal, mon ami. Permit me to introduce you. M. le Comte—M. Charles Gleen. Now, be good friends."

"But take my advice, mon ami," said Marie, "and don't dine at Querhoal when you can dine at Kerhuel."

"That is true," growled Jean. "M. le Comte has one hundred thousand francs a year of income, and he lives like a peasant."

We watched the old man pick up six fallen straws and carry them into the side door, after he had looked searchingly round to see there were no more. Then we turned into the woods again and went on our way.

We had made a wide circuit round the château, and on reaching level ground again we had to cut across an expanse of meadow to reach the river. We were hurrying along when old Bar, who had panted patiently at Marie's heels all the way, stopped suddenly as we passed a clump of bushes and gave a sharp yelp. Then, with his nose to the ground, he began quartering rapidly to and fro, and finally set off for the woods with another yelp, his sturdy hind legs spurning the ground and almost driving his nose into it as he sped along.

"What's taken the old fool?" said Jean angrily. "We must catch him or he'll get into mischief."

The dog bolted round a corner among the trees, and we followed as fast as our legs would carry us. Then we heard his deep baying; and presently, turning another corner, we came on him hurrying to and fro and round and round in a state of much agitation. He would not heed even Marie's voice, and at last Jean pulled out his handkerchief and tied it round his neck; and then, bidding me hold him tight, he took George's, in spite of that young man's remonstrances, and bound it round the dog's muzzle to keep him quiet. It was as much as we could do to get him along, however, and when we reached the river I found we had struck it just at the spot where I had come out on the bank that first day.

"But certainly he is possessed of the devil, as M. le Curé says," said Jean, as he took off the handkerchiefs and bundled the struggling dog into the smooth water above the weir. Bar yelped and barked and made as though to scramble out, and Jean shouted at him and threatened him with stones, and at last he turned and paddled slowly across to the other side.

For the rest of us it was a question of wading or getting wet, so we merrily pulled off our shoes and stockings, Marie insisting on our starting before she took off hers, though

George assured her gleefully that we would wait and watch her at the other end.

"Eh bien! Wait if you want to," said Marie. "Everyone is not so rude as you, bébé!" And Jean and I retired along the bank until she had re-shod herself. Then we merrily followed Bar's wet trail up to the château, laughing as we went over his discomfiture.

CHAPTER VI.

MURDERER! MURDERER! MURDERER!

RARELY a day passed after this without finding me during some portion of it at Beauché. Friends so friendly, and so unreservedly glad of one's company, do not grow by every roadside, and were not to be neglected.

Either it was Jean who hankered for glove exercise; or it was a unanimously-decided-on day's picnic up the river; or it was an annual expedition in company with the seniors to some distant farm to eat junket and galettes, both of which could have been got equally well at home, but which were supposed to derive a novel flavour from the change of surroundings; or it was this, that, or the other.

Good reasons for following one's inclinations are never hard to find, and any reason that took me to Beauché in those days was good, and Madame de Kerhuel's welcome was ever of the warmest. Marie asserted that she was learning more of the grammar and construction of the French language through the correction of my mistakes than ever she had learned at school. And for myself I can confidently assert that her pupil enjoyed to the full her sprightly tuition. Nevertheless, in order to remove as speedily as possible some of the reproach of my slipshod French, I induced M. Renel to give me a conversational lesson each day when more important matters did not claim my attention. Induced, did I say? The good M. Renel nearly fell on my neck when I suggested it, and the few francs a week which it put into his pocket made, I believe, an appreciable addition to his very slender income.

We became the best of friends, and I came to have a very high regard and liking for the amiable little man, whose position was none of the easiest or pleasantest, and who bore the disabilities of it with a meek equanimity through which glowed the spirit of his Master.

We talked of all things under the sun, and necessarily not infrequently of our friends at Beauché. That I was deeply interested in them and all that concerned them goes without saying, and every scrap of information that fell from M. Renel's lips was eagerly gathered up by me.

I asked him once of M. de Kerhuel, of whom my mother knew no more than that he had died some fifteen years before. She feared, however, that there were some painful circumstances connected with his death, since Madame had barely touched upon it. In their conversation she had referred to it as "sudden," and passed on to other subjects.

M. Renel, in reply to my question, told me the circumstances so far as he knew them. It may be as well to condense into one telling all the various items of information which I learned by degrees concerning our friends.

The de Kerhuels, it seemed, were a distant and younger branch of the ancient family of Querhoal, whose most distinguished member was that Duc de Kerouaille who, from being one of the fiercest opponents of Henry of Navarre, became one of the firmest adherents of Henri Quatre. He was one of those who rode behind his master's carriage in that narrow street leading to Sully's house when the dagger of Ravaillac stilled the great heart for ever.

There was blood relationship, therefore, between the families of Beauché and Querhoal, but any possible friendliness had been rendered impossible by the fact that Raoul de Querhoal, father of the present Raoul, and Godefroi de Kerhuel, father of the present Godefroi, had both taken it into their heads to fall in love with that great heiress of Poitou, Anna Destournelles, who was at that time completing her education at the school of the Demoiselles Jacquelicot, in Dinan.

Mdlle. Destournelles favoured M. de Kerhuel, then a young widower with one small boy, Godefroi; and thereafter Raoul, the rejected, hated her and her husband with a hatred which nothing could quench, and never ceased to love her, as the de Querhoals called love, in spite of his own marriage and of hers.

Raoul married, and lost his wife within a year, when his boy was born. Four years later Godefroi de Kerhuel, coming home from Caulnes one foggy night with his servant, Jean Dobain, drove into the Rance, and both were drowned. M. de Kerhuel's body turned up a week later outside St. Malo Bay, so battered and bruised by rocks and keels that only the scapulary on its breast and the ring on its finger enabled the broken-hearted widow to identify it. Later it was rumoured that Raoul de Querhoal had again approached Mme. de Kerhuel with a view to marriage. But Madame was true to her first love, and would have none of him. The priests, she knew, looked with longing eyes on her prospective millions, and Raoul, she knew, was theirs body and soul. Her boys, indeed, were by her marriage contract Catholic; but her daughter was Protestant, and no act of hers should ever place her darling's future in any slightest jeopardy. Besides, she did not like Raoul de Querhoal.

M. de Querhoal travelled much in distant lands, and, returning in time for the Italian campaign, was killed at Solferino. His son Raoul lived on with his terrible old grandfather at the château, and continued his education under the priests, of whom M. Lesieur, of the proscribed Order of Jesus, was head and chief in the department. M. Lesieur had always occupied a position of more or less importance in connection with Querhoal, though, indeed, the head of the family had no faith or hope save what were tied up in his money-bags, and still less charity. He was popularly supposed to be quite ready to sell his soul at any moment for cash down, if indeed he had not already done so, in which case the gossips, as they wagged their grizzled chins over their cups, averred that the devil had undoubtedly got the worst of the bargain. With the heir, however, M. le Curé's word was law.

"How is it Jean and George are going into the army?" I remember asking M. Renel one time. "They seem to hate the idea, and I understood there was no difficulty in getting off."

"No difficulty if one has the money with which to buy a

substitute from the State," said M. Renel. "But times have not been prosperous at Kerhuel, and the old grandpapa down in Poitou has given all the assistance he intends to give until he cannot help himself. It is hard for Madame and for the boys, for the service is not elevating. The old gentleman, I believe, holds that it will do them good. But he himself was an only son, and had not the experience of it. He assisted with the education of all three, and that has been of the best; but for the rest they must wait till he is dead. For the sake of our friends at Kerhuel, one is tempted to wish it might not be unduly delayed. Madame is one who would make the very best use of wealth. For the children—well, it is good to have borne the yoke in one's youth. It teaches common sense. Mon dieu! Some of us bear it all our lives, and still are found a-wanting."

When I reached Beauché the day after our ramble in the woods, I found Marie in dire distress at the disappearance of old Bar, the long brown dog of the melancholy countenance. He had crept out of sight the previous night, and no one had seen him since.

Marie threw all the responsibility on to Jean, and the strong feeling she showed for her old friend touched me strangely, and showed me new depths in a character which had attracted me first by its piquant brightness and irresponsible liveliness.

"You should not have thrown him into the water, Jean," she said. "He is very old, as old as you yourself, and the shock has been too much for him. He has crawled away into some corner to die, and I shall never see him again. My poor dear old Bar!"

"He was possessed of the devil," said Jean sententiously, which, whether true or not as a simple statement of fact, conveyed no information as to Bar's whereabouts, and afforded no comfort to his disconsolate mistress.

"Possessed of your grandmother!" said Marie hotly. "It was you who were possessed to throw him into the water like that."

We searched every nook and corner of the outbuildings,

and probed the mysterious darknesses of the mill, amid the clouds of dust flying fresh from the stones, and the rank smell of that other dust which had lain for years undisturbed till we poked into it in the vain hope of finding Bar, or all that was left of him.

"If he had died quietly here before the fire," said Marie gloomily, "I could have stood it better, for he was very old, and he had to die some time. But it hurts me to think of the poor old thing creeping away all by himself and dying, with no one to stroke his head and say good-bye to him."

But, in spite of all our efforts, we could not find a hair of him; and for three days Marie refused to be comforted, and would not speak a word to Jean, except to reproach him for his inhumanity in throwing Bar into the water. This cast somewhat of a gloom over us all, and our spirits were all in mourning for the old dog.

It was on the third day that Jean took me up into his bedroom for a friendly fight. "Though how you can go and enjoy yourselves when dear old Bar is lying dead somewhere, I cannot imagine," said Marie sombrely.

Instead of putting on the gloves, however, Jean, as soon as he had carefully closed the door, placed his first finger alongside his nose, conspirator fashion, and said, "I have found him."

"Who? Bar?"

"But yes, Bar. He is dead. He was shot in the Querhoal woods. See!" And he took out of a drawer a screw of paper which, when he had opened it, proved to contain a number of small shot. "I found his body in the thickets behind the château. He had been dead three days. I dug those shot out of him."

"But how on earth did he get there do you suppose; and who shot him?"

"He must have swum across the river again that same night. And, as to who shot him, you remember the pigeon that sacré p'tit crêvé of a Raoul shot and Marie buried?"

I nodded. I could see her burying it as he spoke.

"Well, to make quite sure, I dug it up and picked the

shot out of it also. There they are." And he produced another screw of paper. "They are just the same, you see."

"So that it was that little beast Raoul, you suppose?"

"Of course. As a matter of fact anyone can get those cartridges, but no one shoots at Querhoal but Raoul."

"I wonder what he did it for?"

"God knows. Perhaps Bar howled at him. Perhaps he thought he'd lived long enough. Perhaps he did it for fun. As you say, he's a beast."

"Have you told Marie?"

"No. Shall I? Or shall I leave it as it is?"

"I think she would sooner know he is really dead than be in doubt about it; and, besides, she blames you for it at present."

"That matters nothing. But if you think it better, I will tell her."

I thought it better; and, after putting away his two paper screws of shot, he went down then and there and brought her up to his room, and told her how he had found the old dog's body in the bushes behind Querhoal.

"And what was it killed him, Jean?" she asked angrily.

"He was shot."

"Who shot him?"

"I presume it was Raoul. No one else is allowed to shoot at Querhoal but him."

"I hate Raoul, and the first time I see him, I shall tell him what I think of him," she said hotly. "But I am glad you told me, Jean, for I put it down to you. I am sorry. My poor old Bar! Do you think he would suffer, Jean?"

"No," said Jean decisively, though upon what ground I knew not. "He would die instantly. He was so very old, the shock would kill him."

"You buried him?" asked Marie.

"Yes, I buried him."

"My poor, dear old dog! And I cannot even tend his grave."

Now it happened that the very next day, being Thursday, we were fishing again in the punt on the upper stream

above the weir. We had heard occasional shots in the woods, and when there came one at no great distance away Marie begged us to shout all together in hopes of attracting the sportsman, as she wanted to speak to him. And presently Raoul stood on the bank looking down on us with his supercilious smile, neat and trim and dandyfied as before.

"Good-day, Mademoiselle and Messieurs! Good sport, I hope?" he said lightly, as though we were a pack of children.

"Say then, murderer," cried Marie, "why did you shoot my dog?"

He seemed somewhat taken aback at this brusque salute.

"I didn't know it was your dog, Ma'm'selle," he said after a pause.

"Why did you shoot him, murderer?"

"Why did he come howling at my door at midnight?" asked the young man angrily.

"Because he hated you, I suppose, murderer, as I hate you."

"Permit me to inform you that you are very rude, Ma'm'selle."

"Better to be rude than to be a murderer."

"Pshaw! An old dog!"

"He was worth six of his murderer," she cried. "I wish for you, Monsieur, that you may die as he did."

"Marie!" said Jean below his breath. And George said "Mon dieu!"

"Merci, Ma'm'selle! All in good time," said Raoul, and tossed his gun over his shoulder and turned on his heel and strode away.

"Murderer! Murderer! Murderer!" flung Marie after him by way of a parting volley, and then she threw herself down in the punt and sobbed with her face in her hands.

But presently she raised herself up and said, "Now I feel better. I have done what I could for Bar. Allons, mes enfants! Fish, fish, or you will fast to-morrow. Charles, mon ami, unless I am mistaken, there is something on my hook, and you are neglecting it shamefully."

This, then, as I have told it, was the beginning of my intercourse with the houses of Kerhuel and Querhoal. It became, in course of time, a somewhat tangled web, but shot with threads of gleaming gold, and stained, alas! with blood, both innocent and guilty.

Marie was at this time seventeen, George eighteen, and Jean nineteen or thereabouts, and it was the year of grace 1867. And the year of disgrace, the year of the Red Deluge, lay just three years ahead—for some of us.

Jean was, if anything, short in stature for his age, but of sturdy, powerful build. His face showed much determination, but no beauty except such as came from two bold, true eyes. He possessed a fiery temper, which only blazed out occasionally, and I do not remember ever seeing it blaze to any great extent on his own account. Both in manner and speech he was more like the average English public-school boy than the product of a French *lycée*. George, on the other hand, was the priest-trained pupil to the core. He was much younger than his brother and sister in everything except actual years, and so deficient was he in backbone and self-reliance that both Jean and Marie in their moments of annoyance, which were of frequent occurrence, addressed him as "Bébé."

Our friendship grew apace, and I knew, at that time, too little of the manners and customs of French life to understand how very different were the conditions that fostered it from what they might, and, if the matter had rested with M. le Père Lesieur, they would and should have been. I believe that astute and far-seeing gentleman even went the length of remonstrating with Mme. de Kerhuel on the unparalleled liberty she allowed her daughter. But Madame was mistress in her own house—of her own side of it, at all events—and the priestly remonstrance, uttered, I am sure, in the suavest manner and in the most dulcet of tones, apparently fell flat, for no restrictions were imposed on Marie. The girl always had played with her brothers. Why should her freedom be limited because her brothers had a friend who happened to be the son of one of Madame's own dearest

friends? And then, and perhaps chiefly, she was a Protestant, and so had never suffered, in mind or body, the cramping fetters and prudish trammels of the convent school —than which, I suppose, there is only one more objectionable system of education, and that is the *lycée*, especially if its direction be in the hands of the Jesuit brotherhood.

All too soon my holidays were over, but when I stood on the deck of the Southampton boat and waved my final farewells to my mother's responsive handkerchief on St. Malo mole, I could not but feel—and I remember well the slightly guilty sense of it—that, dear as my mother was to me, and never dearer than now, when I was leaving her all alone, she no longer reigned supreme in my heart as she had done hitherto. For Marie de Kerhuel's sweet face and laughing eyes swam in between us, and I would have given much at that moment to know whether the sweet face and the laughing eyes felt Beauché just a little bit the lonelier for my absence.

Possibly my mother knew and understood and was content, for she and Marie had become very dear friends. I have reason to believe that it was so. But at that time my feelings and hopes and aspirations, on this subject at all events, were as shyly hidden as though it were a capital crime for a boy to fall in love with the loveliest and most charming girl he had ever seen. I had met plenty of nice girls before, but, having no sisters and being quite unversed in women's ways, I had always fought rather shy of them. With the best of my fellows I could hold my own; but girls, as girls, were *raræ aves*, and belonged to a branch of the higher sciences which had not yet come within the scope of my studies. Marie's free and delightful camaraderie was a revelation to me. She entered my heart and took possession of it. I think now, as I thought then, as I shall never cease to think, that she was the brightest and most beautiful and most winsome creature God ever made.

And no better thought can boy or man have in his heart than that.

CHAPTER VII.

I GET SOME GOOD ADVICE, BUT DO NOT ACT ON IT.

I MUST touch but lightly on the doings of the next two years, for every hour was bringing us nearer to the terrible times which were to be for us, as for so many others, times of endings and beginnings, times of dreadful loss and wondrous gains, times of downsettings and uprisings, times of life through death; and, in the fulness of time, of peace and joy through deadly strife and the red horror of war.

For me they were years of close, hard work, brightened all through with the great hopes that were working in me. The golden spur kept my neck tight to the collar, and the dulness of the crawling months in London served but to throw into more vivid relief the meteoric golden days I spent in Brittany.

The first boat that left Southampton as soon as term time ended inevitably found me pacing her deck as though the expenditure of a certain amount of personal energy on my part would compass a swifter passage of the waste that lay between me and my heart's desire. Many invitations I had from college friends to pass vacations with them at their homes, but never one did I accept, for all their homes combined could not offer what I hungered and thirsted for, and found only at Kerhuel. And, safely arrived at home, after as short a rest there as would visibly satisfy my dear mother that no ill effects had as yet resulted from my close application to class-room and hospital ward, I was on the road to the château, knowing already, indeed, that all was well with them there, but eager as ever to see with my own eyes the bright face, and to hear with my own ears the sweet voice, of the brightest and sweetest girl in all the world.

Brighter and sweeter and dearer she grew each time I saw her, though each time it took me three much begrudged

days to eliminate the "Monsieur" from our intercourse. After that we got back to within appreciable and much appreciated proximity to the old friendly footing, and the days passed all too quickly.

Madame de Kerhuel's welcome never came short by so much as a hair's breadth of what I would have had it. She could not but know my feelings. The never-failing warmth of her greeting, and of her interest in all my doings, fed my hopes and revived the courage which Marie's formal "Monsieur" used to damp somewhat at first. But I came in time to understand that this last was only a temporary outwork of maiden modesty, and meant nothing more than that Marie was no longer the simple school-girl who tripped with bare feet across the weir right into my heart that first day we met.

Jean grew bigger and broader, but in manner and disposition changed very little. During my second autumn vacation he was looking forward with no pleasant anticipations to his approaching "service," the length of which the annual drawing in January would determine. The prospect of the rigorous restraint and cast-iron discipline already threw their shadow on his restless spirit. He argued gloomily that, as he had never in his life won a prize in any lottery he had ever gone in for, it was too much to expect that this one would prove any exception to the rule. He considered himself cast for the full tale of years, and behaved accordingly.

George, grown lean and tall, had still a year before his time came, and was not much troubled at thoughts of it. Discipline came natural to him. His more amenable nature had learned to obey unquestioningly, and so far had known no revolt. He anticipated no difficulty in getting through his time with the least possible inconvenience to himself, if with no great advantage to his country.

"All you've got to do, Jean, is to stick in with the sergeants. Give them as much drink as they can carry, once a month or so, and they'll make things all right for you," was his advice. And Jean's reply was to the effect that he'd be hanged if he'd do anything of the kind.

"I'll do my duty to the best of my power, and stand their racketing as well as I can," he said, "but suck up to the hectoring brutes and buy their goodwill with drink or anything else! I'll see them shot first."

His forebodings were fully realised. He drew a bad number, and had joined the colours before I returned in the spring.

Of Godefroi, the elder half-brother, we saw very little except at meal times. He had his own circle of friends, and devoted his time to the management of the mill and the Kerhuel property, which would be his when Madame came into her own, and which in the meantime formed the livelihood of the family. Whenever I did meet him he was always pleasantly courteous, but had not much to say to me. He had doubtless had ample opportunity of learning that Madame was head of her own side of the house, and that no interference with her views availed to alter them, and so he confined his attentions to his own affairs and his own pleasures.

My mother had found many old friends in Dinan, though none dearer than those at Kerhuel, and had in addition made many new ones. She was still young in years, in spite of her tall son, and the inestimable blessing of a calm and quiet disposition conserved all her good looks, and indeed made her look younger than she was. No one had so far come in between us—on her side at least. And Marie never came between us, in the sense of disuniting us, in the very smallest degree. On the contrary, when, in due time, I told my mother all my hopes and wishes, they served but to draw us closer together, for, as I have said, she loved Marie very dearly.

"I have seen it all along, my boy," she said, "and I could wish you no better wife nor myself a dearer daughter. Marie is her mother over again—well, yes, perhaps even more beautiful than Anna was—and Anna was my dearest friend, and is so still."

"Has Madame any idea?" I began.

"Why, of course, child. Do you suppose any mother could see a handsome young man——"

"Ahem!"

"Don't be foolish. You are good-looking, Charlie, almost as good-looking as your father was; and she is the loveliest girl I know. You will make a pretty pair. Anna and I have discussed the matter many times."

"Then Madame does not object?" I asked anxiously.

"Object? Why should she object? All she wants is Marie's happiness and well-being, and if you can give her those her mother will be more than satisfied. But," she continued, with a slight knitting of the brow, "it is just as well you should know that you are not the only one who aspires to Marie de Kerhuel."

"Why, who?"

"M. le Comte de Querhoal has formally, and through no less a person than M. le Père Lesieur, requested permission for his grandson Raoul to pay his addresses to Marie."

"And what did Madame say to that?"

"She said she would never, on any consideration, consent to her daughter marrying Raoul, and she told the Curé plainly that Marie detested the young man. The matter has caused a good deal of bad feeling between the two houses. Not that there was ever any love lost between them. But it has created some trouble at Kerhuel also. Godefroi and George side with the Curé."

"And Jean?"

"Jean was never very amenable, as you know. But for quite twelve months before he left home he threw off all control in religious matters, and the feeling between him and M. le Curé has been very strained. But surely you must have noticed that yourself? Has he never spoken of it?"

"Jean was not in the habit of speaking of his feelings, but I remember him walking out of the room one day when he saw M. Lesieur coming up the road."

"M. le Curé feels very sore at losing his hold on him. I don't like that man, Charlie," she said confidentially.

"I doubt if M. le Curé will lie awake of a night in consequence, mother mine. On the other hand, he is nothing

to us, and I do not see that we need trouble ourselves about him."

"He is a Jesuit," she said, with a doubtful shake of the head, "and a Jesuit with a fixed idea sticks at nothing."

"And what do you imagine to be M. le Curé's fixed idea, mother?"

"To control, as far as possible, the fortune that will some day be Madame de Kerhuel's. While he had Jean and George safe in his hands, he could look forward to controlling, to some extent at all events, the reversion of two-thirds of it, you see. If he could have married Marie to Raoul he would have stood a good chance of the whole in time. Now he is reduced to one-third, and that is the root of the bitterness that is in him."

"You and Madame have evidently discussed matters down to the ground."

"Anna has been much troubled about it. Do you know, Charlie, I really think she would be delighted to see you and Marie safely married, just to put an end to any hopes they may have in that quarter."

"Come, this is distinctly encouraging."

"I do not see what he can do, but I am quite sure he will do anything and everything he can to oppose you."

"I'll punch his head if he tries," I declared.

"A priest of the Roman Church may be, and often is, a thoroughly good man and a gentleman. But a Jesuit, a Jesuit with an overmastering idea, I do not like," she said didactically. "A man who adopts as one of the tenets of his creed that the end justifies the means is a very dangerous man to quarrel with."

"Don't you worry about him, mother. If Madame gives me the right to look after Marie, and Marie consents, it will take more than fifty Father Lesieurs to keep me from her. Shall I ask her permission at once?"

"If you are sure of Marie's feelings."

"Ah! Who can be sure until he has put the question and received his answer? Do you—do you think there is anyone else, mother?"

"I do not think so, my boy. I have never seen her so friendly with anyone as with yourself."

"There is a difference between being friendly and being willing to marry one," I said. "I would sooner have waited till I had, at all events, some definite prospects to offer her."

"She will have no dowry to speak of till old M. Destournelles dies," said my mother in a businesslike tone. "But then she will have half a million francs, and as much more later."

"That's the trouble. I have nothing to offer her yet, and she will have so much."

"Yourself!" said my mother, as though that counterbalanced everything on the other side. "And your prospects could not be better. You will have your M.B. and B.S. in October."

"Hope so."

"And the others will follow, and then——"

"Well, I'll wait, at all events, till those degrees are safe. Then I shall feel as if I had something solid to stand on."

And I waited longer than I had any intention of doing.

Next day, as I was walking out to Kerhuel, I overtook my good friend M. Renel, also on his way there. He was exuberantly glad to see me back again, and we tramped along between the poplars, full of pleasant talk. Presently hove in sight M. le Curé, on his way back to the town. He stopped and greeted us with his usual jovial bonhomie, and looked as little like a deep-plotting schemer as a well-fed, red-faced, jolly-looking gentleman in a nondescript garment and a broad-brimmed flat beaver could well look.

"Ah, ah, Messieurs! Monsieur Glyn, what wouldn't I give to have springs in my feet as you have! Is it London that agrees with you so well or Brittany?"

"Both, M. le Curé," I said. "It's the rotation of crops does it."

"Ah, yes! The rotation of crops! The ploughing and the sowing and the hoeing round the little green shoots of knowledge in London, and——"

"The slicing and the cutting and the separation of

joints and sinews. If ever you have an accident, M. le Curé, I hope you'll not forget me. A leg or an arm, now, or a pressure on the brain. I'm specially good on the brain——"

"Bloodthirsty youth," he smiled, "regarding everyone you meet as a prospective subject. When I feel any undue pressure on the brain I will promise to think of you; but, mind, I do not promise to send for you. M. le Pasteur, your flock is well, and still true to its shepherd?"

"I am obliged to M. le Curé for his interest in it. Nevertheless I will make a pastoral visit."

"To make sure that the wolf has not torn the tender lamb," laughed the Curé. "Eh bien, Messieurs, I wish you good morning and good appetite for a very good breakfast." And he saluted us very courteously with the flat beaver and an elegant bow, and passed on.

"His self-description is sufficiently precise," said M. Renel sententiously, as we walked on.

"But he is harmless in your fold, M. le Pasteur?"

"A Jesuit is never harmless, and least of all when most he looks so."

"What is he up to now?"

"The good of his Church, he would say. The aggrandisement of M. Lesieur, a less charitable verdict might pronounce."

"But how?"

"You remember what I told you once before? The fathers of the Church never forget that our dear friend Madame de Kerhuel has much money coming to her, which must come in time to her children. They want that money kept in the right channels—that is to say, the channels that lead down to the priestly coffers. The man who can bring that about will deserve well of Mother Church. M. le Curé believes himself to be the man. He has been doing everything in his power to bring about an alliance between M. Raoul de Querhoal and our dear young friend Mdlle. Marie." And he looked keenly at me as he spoke.

"And Ma'm'selle?"

"Ma'm'selle detests M. Raoul, and Madame will not hear

of it. But supposing anything happened to Madame, Ma'm'selle might be very uncomfortably situated. Therefore——"

"Therefore, my dear M. Renel?" I asked, as he did not continue.

"Therefore, my dear M. Glyn, if things are as I have dared at times to hope between you and Mademoiselle, take your courage in both hands and go forward. She is one among ten thousand, and as good as she is beautiful, and as beautiful as she will be rich some day."

"That is the trouble, dear M. Renel. Marie will be rich, and I am comparatively poor. My profession is practically all I shall have, and, as you know, it is a slow and arduous climb nowadays. I love her with all my heart and soul, but I cannot go to her with quite empty hands."

"You may wait too long," he said anxiously; and I saw how kindly disposed he was to both of us.

"I hope not. If I get my degrees this year, as I hope to do, I will speak to her at Christmas."

"If nothing happens meanwhile, that will do," he said. "One of the happiest days of my life will be the day I join you two. I will keep it as a holiday for all the rest of my life."

"You are the very nicest pastor I ever met, M. Renel," I said; and we tramped on in silence for a time, both occupied with our own thoughts. Then said M. Renel:

"You see, Monsieur Jean has slipped through his fingers, and M. le Curé feels very sore about it. I do not think very much of Jean's portion will ever enrich the Church."

"What started the ill-feeling?" I asked.

"It is hard to say. Jean was always very independent and somewhat uncontrollable, the exact opposite of his brother, who always seemed to me too much the other way"

"M. le Curé possibly let him feel the bit, and he kicked over the traces. Jean would need a very delicate hand on the reins."

"It is his nature, but I always liked him better than the

other. Do you hear from him? How does he get on in his service?"

"He's pretty sick of it all. He seems to be constantly in hot water, and from the little he says I should say it's a somewhat rough experience."

"I do not suppose he tells them very much at home, but I gathered that he was not very happy. George will get on better. The yoke comes natural to him. When does he go?"

"After the New Year."

"Will you, next time you write to M. Jean, Monsieur Charles," said the good little man, very impressively, and with his hand on my arm, "beg him to hold himself sternly in check. He is not of my flock, and perhaps he might resent advice coming from me. But I know his hasty temper, and I know somewhat of the extreme unpleasantness of his position. For his mother's and his sister's sake I would have no harm come to him."

"Why, what harm should come to him, M. Renel?" I asked.

"God knows," he said. "But, all the same, urge upon him to bear the unpleasantnesses quietly and manfully. They are but for a time, they will pass. Bid him think of his mother and sister."

Marie, I thought, had never looked so charming, and never had she been kinder or more friendly towards me. I was sorely tempted to break my resolve and put my fortune —my lack of fortune—to the test, by telling her how dear she was to me, and how poor a thing the future would be to me unless she shared it. Had she been as poor as myself, I would have spoken then and there. But, prospectively at all events, she was rich, and I waited.

We spent quieter times at the château now that Jean's roving spirit was bottled up in a trooper's uniform. George was immersed in his studies, and M. le Curé spent much time with him.

"He is going to be a priest," said Marie, with much contempt in her voice.

We were sitting in the big window looking out over the mill and the river and the never-to-be-forgotten weir, for her French maidenliness forbade the thought of rambling abroad with me quite alone, as we used to do "when we were children."

"I am not much surprised. But I am sorry. It must be a disappointment to your mother."

"Yes. There M. le Curé wins his game," she said a little bitterly. "George says he is going to be a cardinal before he dies."

"It is a great ambition," I said. "Perhaps Jean will compensate by becoming a general."

"Jean will never be a general," she said. "He hates the army."

"What has he set his mind on? Whatever it is, he'll get there, I should say."

"He wants to ramble far and wide and be a discoverer."

"I remember, that was his old idea."

"It has always been the wish of his life, and nothing else will make him happy."

"But George still talks as if he had to serve his time like the rest."

"He goes for short service, but if he has not become a priest by the time he is twenty-six then he has to go back and complete the full term."

"It's an awful break in a man's life."

"Yes; you are truly happy in England to have no conscription. Jean, I fear, is not enjoying himself. Does he ever write to you?" And she looked at me steadfastly.

"Yes, occasionally; but he never says much in the way of complaint. He is not one to show his feelings."

"I miss him terribly, now that he is gone," she said. "I never knew how dear he was to me, and how much a part of my life."

"I've half a mind to run over to Quercy and see him."

"Oh, do, Charles," she said, laying her hand impulsively on my arm. "It would give him such very great pleasure."

"I will. I wonder if George would care to come?"

"It's possible he may think he'll be there quite soon enough. They are going to try and get him into the same regiment as Jean."

"That should make things pleasanter for both of them."

"We hope so," she said. "I wish I could go and see my dear Jean also. I know he is not happy. He does not say so—to us. But there is no enjoyment of life in his letters, and I'm afraid I can read between the lines."

"Why shouldn't you and Madame go with us? That would be very jolly. It would cheer the old boy up more than fifty visits from me."

"You shall suggest it to the mother. It would mean three days. Quercy is a stupid place to get to, and the journey would take the best part of a day, and that would give us one whole day there."

Madame was deep in discourse with M. Renel beside the fireplace. As soon as I saw a propitious opening I struck in with:

"Dear Madame, I am thinking of running over to Quercy to see Jean. Why should not you and Mademoiselle Marie come also, and afford him the greater treat?"

"It is a good idea," said M. Renel.

Madame seemed pleased with the suggestion, but thoughtful. She turned presently to M. Renel and asked:

"You think it is a good idea, my friend?"

"Truly, but—you had better write first, Monsieur Charles, and get M. Jean's own views as to what day would be suitable for him. He is not his own master, you know, and he cannot by any means do what he would."

"I will write to him as soon as I get home," I said. And Marie clapped her hands at thought of the coming excursion.

George, when he came down from his own room, where he was deep in his studies, approved the plan, but with no great enthusiasm.

"I hope he won't fix on next Sunday," he said. "I have promised M. le Curé to go with him to the Celebration at

Dol. The Cardinal-Archbishop is to be there, and he is to present me to him."

"I would sooner see Jean than all the cardinals in the world and the Pope thrown in," said Marie.

"Of course you would, ma chérie," said George drily. "It is natural. To a little heretic, cardinals, and even popes, cannot possibly appeal. With me it is different."

I wrote to Jean that night, and in due course received his reply. It ran thus:—

"MY DEAR CHARLES,—

"Yes, I would much like a visit from you, but the only day I can fix is next Sunday, the 18th. I am at the moment fairly free from punishments, but God only knows what may happen in the meantime. I am sorry this clashes with George's engagement with the Cardinal-Archbishop, but he will enjoy his company much more than he would mine. How dearly I would like to see the little Marie and my dear mother I cannot tell you. But beg them not to come here. It would give them no pleasure, but the contrary. It is somewhat of a chance even my being able to spend the afternoon with you. A trooper may propose, but the gods—or, rather, those devils of sergeant-majors—dispose, and their disposition is, as a rule, of the most evil. But if you care to take the chance yourself, I would dearly like to see you. Go straight to the Hôtel de France, secure a private room, and order such a meal as you see fit for two o'clock. Call it what you like so long as it is good. Tell Maman and the little Marie that I shall enjoy seeing them at Christmas a thousand times more than seeing them here, nor do I think they would enjoy the visit. No more now. Au revoir till the 18th.

"Yours,

JEAN."

Marie demanded a sight of this letter, and I had no alternative but to hand it to her. She was inclined to be

cast down at it and to brood over it. But Madame took a more sensible view.

"I am not sure but he is right, Charles," she said. "I know he dislikes all the surroundings of his present life. He does not want us associated with them. It is perhaps natural. And he will get eight days with us at Christmas. We must all look forward to that. Mon dieu! I wish he was back with us for good."

George did not seem greatly put out at the visit being fixed for the very day on which he could not go. He expressed regret, indeed; but it did not strike me as very deep, for he was looking forward to meeting the Cardinal-Archbishop at Dol as one of the great occasions of his life

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CHAPTER VIII.

PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF.

I REACHED Quercy on the Saturday evening, and went to the Hôtel de France; and next morning I secured a private room, and ordered such a meal as I thought would suit Jean, for two o'clock. Then I strolled out to have a look at the town.

It struck me as gloomy and uninteresting. I looked into the cathedral church, where a great crowd of country-women in very big white caps, and a few grizzly-faced men in their best stiff Sunday blouses, were stolidly watching the back of a gorgeously attired priest at the high altar, and following his incantations as best they might. I crossed the deserted market-place, and passed through the square, of which the theatre occupied the most of one side and cafés all the others, and the cafés overflowed on to the sidewalks with handsomely dressed officers of all ages and shapes and sizes. To glance through the windows was like looking through the glass pane of a teeming beehive, and gave one a sense of ceaseless movement; while to put one's head inside the door provoked a stare of astonishment at the audacity of a person in ordinary attire so greatly daring, and filled one's ears with the discomforts of a pandemonic gabble.

I passed on through lower quarters of the town, where the cafés were of a different order, and would, I supposed, be filled later on by the common rank and file; and so in time found my way to the barracks, a huge, forbidding building, which even at a distance conveyed an impression of bare discomfort.

I watched the men hanging listlessly from the open windows, and the others who presently began streaming eagerly out towards the town, and I wondered if I should know my friend in his uniform even if I chanced to come across him. But I thought I would recognise Jean's sturdy figure and frank face, and straight, true eye , even under the

eaves of a brass helmet, and so I stood and watched for his coming. When two o'clock boomed from the cathedral tower I made up my mind I had missed him after all, and hurried back to the hotel.

But he had not yet arrived. The waiter asked if he should send up the breakfast I had ordered for two o'clock. I told him my friend must have been detained, I would ring as soon as he came. At half-past two the waiter came quietly in again, apparently to see if I had fallen asleep.

"I'm sorry my friend is so late, garçon," I said. "Just tell the chef to do the best he can. He can't be long now."

"Is Monsieur's friend militaire?" asked the waiter, with sympathetic interest.

"Yes; in the 17th Dragoons."

"Officer, Monsieur?"

"No; he is doing his service."

"Ah, they are strict, very strict sometimes. Monsieur may have had his leave cancelled—a dozen things. It is often so. We will do all possible, Monsieur." And I waited patiently, while I knew the pleasant little breakfast I had prepared was spoiling downstairs.

It was close on four o'clock before Jean came hurriedly in, and I was glad I had not waited near the barracks in hopes of knowing him.

He looked imposingly big in his horse-tailed helmet and epaulettes, and very bulky about the legs with their voluminous trousers—red cloth above and black leather below—and heavy boots with spurs.

"Enfin, Monsieur who arrives!" said the waiter, appearing in his wake.

"Yes, hurry things up, garçon, and do the very best possible——"

"Under the circumstances," added Jean grimly. "My dear old boy, you see how well it was that Marie and my mother did not come. One can never tell from one hour to another how one may be situated in this accursed hole. But I'm mighty glad to see you, Charlie, it's like coming to the surface again just to see your face. How are they all

looking and feeling at home? God! What wouldn't I give to be back there and done with all this infernal business! You'll excuse me, old chap, won't you?" And he dropped his helmet and sword into one corner, and flung his big gloves into another, and loosened his belt and tunic. "I'll feel more like myself when I've got rid of some of these bonds and fetters."

"Take off your boots and trousers too, if you feel like it, my child," I said. "They look monstrously unnatural somehow. Who were they made for, and was the man who made them sober?"

"They were made for Trooper X, of the 17th Dragoons, and I think I'd better keep the trousers on. No one could say they're too tight," he said, "but the boots are beastly uncomfortable. Off they go. I'd give ten years off the other end of my life, Charles, to get putting on an old suit and never seeing those damned things again."

"That doesn't sound too patriotic, my boy."

"Patriotic! Do you imagine they manufacture patriots in the French army?" But the entrance of the waiter with the soup interrupted any further outflow of eloquence on his part, and we discussed home matters till the meal—wonderfully preserved, I am bound to say—was finished, and we were left alone with coffee and cognac and cigars.

"Now, old boy," I said, "you're not happy in your work here. I know that from your letters."

"Happy!" he said. "Can a man be happy in hell? And that's what it is to me, Charles. It's hell, hell, hell! And I've got four years more of it." And his face was full of the intensest hatred of it all. "I have been tempted many times to blow out my brains. I have been tempted many more times to blow out several other people's."

"Why, what's wrong?"

"Wrong? Everything's wrong. The whole system's wrong, from top to bottom. I came here," he said slowly, "determined to do my duty and put up with everything without a murmur. I knew it would be rough, but I could rough it as well as another. But I did expect to be treated

as a human being—that at least. That seemed to me the irreducible minimum. I did not suppose they could get much below it. But they do, my friend. Why, a dog's life is nothing to it. Ordinary slavery is philanthropy to it. It is degradation of the very worst, and it turns men into devils."

"But," I said, in much surprise, "is what you are telling me the rule, or is it special to the Quercy treatment?"

"That I can't say, for I've had no experience except of the Quercy treatment. It is probably much the same elsewhere. It may be anyway. It depends entirely on the officers. Their power is absolute—life and death, and heaven and hell; and here it's hell. The explanation of the whole matter is very simple. Things have been running very loose in the army for years past. The way the Prussians have knocked Austria into a cocked hat has scared our people at headquarters. They are trying now to brace matters up with a round turn. They are trying to remedy the evil effects of ten years of looseness in the half of no time, and it's a stiff job. And the officers don't, as a rule, second them. They've got used to being lazy, and they shirk the collar. They want better results, no doubt, but they don't want to do the hard work. Everything is left to the sergeants, and ours are a set of devils. They've been through the mill themselves long since, and been brow-beaten and bullied and hounded till every spark of humanity has been ground out of them. And as they were treated so they treat us. Training!" he said bitterly. "It might be training of the very best. As it is, it is a simple, absolute degradation." And the last word hissed out like a curse. "Bon dieu!" he said again, "if there was a war, you'd see some strange things—that is if other depôts are like this of Quercy."

"This all sounds pretty bad, Jean. Is there no remedy?"

"Remedy? Yes. A war that will sweep the whole cursed thing away for ever. I can tell you one thing, mon ami, if ever there is a war, the sergeants' mess of the 17th Dragoons won't know itself after the first battle. It will be wiped out—from behind—and some of the officers too."

"That strikes one as rather horrible, you know."

"Of course it's horrible. So is cutting out a cancer, I believe. The only fault I would find with it is that it's sharp and quick, whereas the longest drawn torture would not compensate for what they make us suffer every hour of the day and night almost."

"Yes, it is true," he said, unconsciously answering my unspoken thoughts. "It absolutely spoils one's better nature. It lowers one lower than the brutes."

Now all this troubled me greatly, both on Jean's own account and from fear lest it should all tend towards some catastrophe which might bring dire distress to those who were still dearer to me than Jean himself.

I drew from him, with no little difficulty and only by the most persistent questioning, some details of his daily trials, and in his own words they seemed to amount to this:

"Of the daily work I say nothing, much of it is filthy and disgusting. Of the companionship nothing also. Those things are much what I expected. They are perhaps somewhat worse than I expected in some particulars; but all that is nothing. The root of the trouble lies with the officers. If they did their duty, instead of wasting their time round the town and delegating all their powers to men whose only idea of using it is for the swelling of their own pride and positions and pockets, things might be different. On the one side you have men of inferior education with absolute powers of inflicting punishments of the most galling character, men who are always on the make either in cash or kind—for when you don't buy off a punishment the fact of their inflicting it commends them to their superiors as energetic officers worthy of promotion. And on the other side you have men in many cases infinitely better educated than themselves, whom they therefore take special delight in bullying and, as they say, "breaking"; men absolutely without the power of appeal to any higher authority, men of honour and self-respect. God help them, they soon lose it! Under such conditions what can you expect but hell? And we get it. It is the flagrant injustice that bites. Punishment

fairly deserved any man can suffer in silence. Punishment inflicted capriciously by a bullying ruffian not fit to train a dog, and inflicted out of spite, or a desire to earn promotion, or to squeeze constantly increasing sums of money out of you! My friend, may you never know the bitterness of it! It turns one's heart to gall."

I could minister no consolation to these bitter wounds. I could only beg him, for the sake of those at home, to bear himself like a man.

"Like a block of wood," he said. "It is not man's work to suffer these things."

"Well, like anything you choose. Only keep that fiery temper of yours in check. You have managed it so far."

"It has been tried to the last point at times."

"I am sure of it. The more honour to you for having kept so tight a hand on it. Possibly things may improve somehow."

"I doubt it," he said gloomily.

"They are trying to get George into your regiment. Do you advise it, or shall he go elsewhere?"

"I have thought of that a good deal," he said. "If I knew that things were different elsewhere, I would say send him anywhere sooner than here. But I fear they are much the same everywhere. Human nature, such as it is in officers and sergeants, is probably much the same all round. And in that case my own experiences here may be useful to him. I can put him up to things which he would have to learn by bitter experience himself elsewhere."

"Yes, that is what we supposed."

"I don't want you to tell all this to the home people, Charles," he said. "It would only make the mother and Marie unhappy. I have tried my best to keep it out of my letters, but——"

"Marie, at all events, fears that you are having a hard time of it."

"Dear little girl," he said. "We were always such good friends. Do you know, Charles, I have hoped at times——" He stopped and looked at me.

"Hoped what, my dear?"

"I have hoped that you and Marie might come together. Perhaps I ought not to have said it——"

"It is the greatest hope of my life, Jean!" And we gripped hands on it heartily.

He brightened over the discussion of this and other home matters, and by the time he rose to go was decidedly more cheerful. He even laughed as he girded himself into his trappings.

"It may amuse you to know that I am at the present moment undergoing confinement to barracks. In itself that is a trifling punishment, and I decided that it should not stand in the way of my enjoying your society for an afternoon."

"And what had you done to earn that distinction?"

"Nominally it was for quarrelling. The fellow in the next bed to me came home drunk last night and insisted on trying to get into my bed, and I can tell you there's no room to spare. I threw him quietly on to his own bed three times, and the fourth time I gave him a crack on the head in addition. He got nothing—except the bang on the head! I got a week's stoppage of leave. Two days before I had declined to lend the sergeant of the week one hundred francs. He's already had a thousand from me at different times, and it seemed to me a poor investment since I got no benefit whatever from it."

"And how did you manage to get out?"

"I tipped the corporal of the week to say I was on stable duty if any inquiry was made for me, and now I'm leaving early so as to be in in time to change my clothes before evening call."

"I'm sorry you had to take any risks for the purpose of meeting me."

"Oh, it's all right. I'll get in without any trouble. At first I wouldn't do anything of this kind, but now I'm a hardened sinner."

We went out together, Jean assuring me that it was the first pleasant day he had had since he came to Quercy, and thanking me very heartily for my visit.

He stood outside the door for a couple of minutes to make

sure there was nothing undesirable about in uniform, and then we walked down the street.

He led me by back ways which avoided the square and the cafés; avoided even the streets which contained the troopers' drinking-dens, though we heard the clamour of their enjoyment, and passed some of them who had already got their quantum rolling homewards with linked arms and wandering legs and maudlin songs.

We had reached the bridge leading over the river to the barracks, and had got as far as the second lamp on it, when we encountered a man in uniform swinging across towards the town.

"Sacré—nom de chien!" I heard, in a whisper of disgust at my side, as Jean's hand went rigidly up to the salute.

"Tiens!" said the other, coming to an abrupt stand. "It is Trooper Kerhuel, is it not? What are you doing here, my man?"

"I have been seeing my friend here, Sergeant."

"Is he of your family?"

"I may say yes," said Jean.

"It seems doubtful, however," said the sergeant sarcastically. "How is it, Monsieur?" turning to me.

"I am hoping to have the honour of an alliance with the family of Monsieur de Kerhuel, M. le Sergeant," I said.

"Ah, Monsieur is Prussian from his accent."

"No, M. le Sergeant, I am English."

"Same thing! Damn all Englishmen!" he said, with withering contempt, and turned to Jean. "Trooper Kerhuel, I gave you a week's confinement to barracks this morning; you will report yourself to the sergeant-major for eight days salle-de-police. And take my advice, keep better company in future." Then, as Jean saluted once more, he turned and went on his way.

"That's the kind of hog we have to submit to——" began Jean.

"How will it affect you if I go and punch his head?" I asked, rankling under the sergeant's insults.

"Do me no good, my boy, nor you either. Let it pass.

If you punch his head you'd have to fight, and it's very doubtful if you'd get fair play. Your life is more valuable than his. The enjoyment I've had in your company is worth fifteen days salle-de-police."

We went on to the barracks, and parted there with promises on my part to repeat the visit before very long.

I strolled back across the bridge towards the hotel with my blood still boiling from that rascally sergeant's words, and on my way I passed through the square. The cafés were all in full swing, and looked very gay and animated. The windows and doors were wide open, and I could see and hear all that was going on. At the further corner of the colonnade was one that seemed the special haunt of non-commissioned officers. At a table near the open window, with his back to the door, sat the man whose head I was aching to punch. He was evidently of a cantankerous disposition, for he was already in hot dispute with three other sergeants, one of his own regiment and two of the Line, whose table he seemed to have invaded. I passed through the open door and took a seat at a small round table behind mine enemy, who was too much occupied to notice me.

I could not pick up the point of the dispute. It seemed, however, to turn on some point of etiquette. Possibly the late comer had insisted on placing himself where he could overhear a private chat between the other three. It gave me an idea.

I beckoned to a scudding waiter.

"I want a bottle of champagne," I said.

"Champagne! Oui, Monsieur. Small bottle?"

"No, large, and four glasses."

"Oui, Monsieur."

He was gone so long that I knew they had had to send out for it. Champagne was not much in demand in a non-com. café, where an order for "cognac fine" stamped a man as a bloated aristocrat. The unusualness of the proceeding was further indicated by the jingling flourish with which the little waiter set down the tray containing the bottle and the glasses before me, with much pride and an emphatic "Cham-

pagne, Monsieur!" loud enough to be heard above the surrounding babel.

I paid him and requested him to draw the cork. He brought me my change, and accepted fifty centimes for himself with an air of confidential devotion to my interests that was infinitely diverting. He then drew the cork with a resounding pop that attracted still further attention, and with another emphatic, "Champagne, Monsieur," he wiped up the drops and stood away to watch me begin on the bottle. I lifted the tray and placed it on the table where sat the four sergeants. Their dispute had died down into sullen growls.

"Messieurs," I said, addressing the linesmen and the other dragoon, "will you do me the favour of joining me over a bottle of champagne?"

The three brightened up into surprised cheerfulness.

"Mon dieu!" said the dragoon, who was big and burly and jovial looking. "That is too good an offer to refuse. Monsieur is too kind."

"Champagne!" murmured the infantrymen. "Dieu-de-dieu!"

"I wanted to consult you gentlemen on a point of manners," I said, filling glasses for the three and myself, and they assumed a look of extreme interest both in my words and my proceedings. "I am, gentlemen, as you perceive, an Englishman. My father was a colonel in the English army. He fought side by side with France in the Crimea. He was killed at the head of his regiment two years ago in India——"

"A brave man!" said the dragoon warmly. "Monsieur is to be congratulated." And the infantrymen murmured acquiescence.

"A few moments ago I was walking in the street here with a friend of mine, whom I had travelled a hundred miles to see—a trooper in your regiment, Monsieur." The sergeant bowed, as though the regiment, as represented by himself, was thereby honoured. "While we were walking, another dragoon came up, spoke to my friend, and addressed

myself. On my replying, he informed me that from my accent he perceived I was a Prussian——"

"Monsieur's accent is perfect," said the dragoon.

"Quite marvellous!" murmured the Line.

"I informed the gentleman that I was English. He replied: 'Damn all Englishmen!' and advised my friend to keep better company in future. Now, I have the curiosity to know whether such conduct is considered correct by other wearers of the uniform of France? What do you say, gentlemen?"

"Nom-de-dieu!" said the dragoon; "a man like that ought to be kicked. But, Monsieur, we get some awful blackguards occasionally, and when they are not actually under one's heels one cannot really be responsible for them."

"Quite so. It must be so in every army. But this man wore the uniform of a sergeant, and from a sergeant of French Dragoons one looks for conduct more correct than that. Is it not so?"

"Nom-de-dieu!" broke out the dragoon, "that is so. But, you know, Monsieur, there are sergeants *and* sergeants, and now and again one crawls up into the three stripes and forgets to leave the gutter behind him." And he snapped a defiant glance up table at the stormy face of the man who had insulted me. That exceedingly angry gentleman had sat in his corner chewing his moustache, as I could see by the mirror opposite, and sipping, with an attempt at nonchalance, at his tiny glass of cognac, which had long been exhausted. He could not get out without asking me to move, and this his temper would not permit him to do.

"Why," I said, slightly altering my position so that my eyes seemed to fall on him for the first time, "that is the very man who so insulted me."

"I'm not a bit surprised at it," growled the sergeant near me. "It's just what one would expect of him."

Then, in the mirror, I saw the angry one stoop to pick up his helmet which he had placed on the floor. I heard the scrape of his chair on the floor, and supposed he had had enough of it. Next moment I was dragged violently out of

my seat by my big friend, just as the other one's helmet, swung by the long horsetail plume, came crashing down on my chair with a force that would certainly have cracked my skull if I had been sitting there.

"You pig-head!" shouted my man lifting me up. "Is it murder you want?"

But I had got all the opening I needed, and almost before the other had risen from the swing of his blow my fists met his face with a crack-crack that made the hot blood in me tingle with joy. My right came against his nose, and my left against his right eye, and he sat down suddenly, with blood streaming from him. In an instant the place was in an uproar. Dragoons and linesmen sprang up. Cries of "Piou-piou!" "Citrouilles!" broke out all round. My big sergeant caught me by the arm and swung me out through the door into the street.

"Go, Monsieur; go quick!" he said, and his face was full of enjoyment. "You have done well, nom-de-dieu! Very well! But he is a savage brute."

"Here is my card," I said. "If he wants any more he can have it. But, remember, I will fight only with my fists."

"He will not fight, Monsieur. He was wholly in the wrong. It was that made him so mad." And he tore the card up into small pieces.

"I will wait at the Hôtel de France till to-morrow evening."

"Bien, Monsieur, but go now, I beg of you—and thousand thanks!"

When I came to think it all over in cool blood, I regretted what I had done. Not as regards myself, but on Jean's account. If, as might well be feared, that brute of a sergeant vented his spite on him in default of myself, Jean might have good cause to rue the day I visited Quercy. How well I had preached to my friend patience under insult, and what an egregious ass I had made of myself when my turn came! And yet I felt that to have left the matter where it was would have also left me somewhat contempt-

ible in my own eyes. As to possible consequences to myself, I was not greatly troubled. If my opponent desired a further encounter, the offer must come from him. He had struck first, I had replied. We were even so far, but he had had decidedly the worst of it. If he wanted more fight, I would fight, but, as the challenged, the choice of weapons would be mine, and the only weapons I would fight with would be my fists, and I would make a special stipulation against kicking.

I waited patiently all next day, but no message reached me, and I left by the last very "petite-vitesse" night train for Rennes and home.

At the château the following afternoon I was subjected to arbitrary and searching inquisition by Marie. She wanted to know every possible particular as to Jean's looks, feelings, surroundings—everything. It taxed my ingenuity to the utmost to tell her no actual lies and yet to hide the whole truth from her. But I felt it absolutely necessary to do so, for to have made full disclosure of Jean's extreme discomfort and suffering would simply have meant laying an intolerable burden on her shoulders, without any possibility of lightening it on his. She and her mother would have fretted themselves ill at their helplessness, and no one would have been benefited. And so I dissembled with care: made much of Jean's enjoyment at seeing me and hearing all about them all: acknowledged that, from what he had told me, the path of a conscript was not strewn with roses: but as to the actual facts of the case said nothing. I cannot say I was satisfied with myself. The position was unpleasant and unnatural to me; but there was no help for it, and I did my best.

And I am afraid Marie was no more satisfied with me than I was myself. Her large eyes rested gravely on me at times, and made me so extremely uncomfortable that I began to regret that I had ever gone to Quercy at all. Possibly she understood, however, for after a time she ceased to press me.

"Does Jean advise George going into his regiment, if it can be managed?" she asked as a wind-up.

"He does. I put that question plainly to him, and he approves the idea."

This seemed to reassure her somewhat, and I was mightily relieved when the ordeal was over.

A few days later I received a few lines from Jean. He stated that for two days Sergeant Lebeau had not shown up on parade, and when he did at last put in an appearance he brought with him a black eye. That had somehow to Jean's mind so immediately suggested me that he was bursting with impatience to know if I was the author of it. "If it is so, I shall be delighted, my boy," he wrote. "Just say yes or no in your next letter. Any particulars you shall give me by word of mouth over our next meal together, to which I am already looking forward with the greatest eagerness. And do not go worrying yourself with the idea that, if it is as I hope, he will vent his spleen on me. He seems under something of a cloud lately, quite apart from the black eye, and has been drafted on to the later comers, who are having a devil of a time of it. He treats every man in his *peloton* as though he were the giver of the black eye, and I am sorry for them. Except for the consequences to yourself, I wish you had knocked his head off."

This letter gave me much comfort. I have since had reason to believe, however, that in the largeness of his heart the dear fellow was acting to me as I had acted to Marie, and concealing much for the sake of my peace of mind.

August sped past all too quickly, and in September I returned to my work, big with hope and intention for the coming examinations.

The temptation to tell Marie all that was in my heart was almost overpowering; but I think she knew it all, and I had implicit trust in her. If she felt towards me as I hoped, she would wait for me to speak as soon as I felt it right to do so. If she did not so feel, she was absolutely free, and it would be better that I had not spoken.

As I bade her "Good-bye till Christmas!" her hand lay in mine for a moment, and I looked into her sweet, true eyes. They looked trustfully into my own. I thought I read her

heart in them. I am sure she read mine. A spark from heaven shot from the liquid depths and struck fire in my heart and set it plunging furiously. I bent and kissed the little white hand and hurried away. She was still at the door when I turned at the distant corner of the road. The white hand waved to me. I waved mine back.

Before I saw her again, the beginning of the end had come, and that had happened which left its mark on all our lives.

CHAPTER IX.

HOPES POSTPONED.

My examinations came off in October. That I did so well in them as to cause my professors much jubilation, and the expression of opinion that the final M.D. and M.S. degrees were as good as in my pocket, though they were not actually obtainable for another twelve months, was entirely due to Marie.

When I looked round at the intent and eager faces of my competitors, I wondered if any one among them had such a prize at stake as I had. The strength of my love for her put a fine point on all my knowledge and understanding, difficulties and obscurities vanished at thought of her and all I was striving for, and I came through triumphantly. Three days before Christmas I packed my bag and set off with a rush, to which crawling express trains and wallowing rafts of steamers were simply clogs and hindrances, but painful necessities all the same. Even the wings of an eagle would have been somewhat inadequate! For my heart was already at Kerhuel, and I was telling Marie all that was in it, and seeking in her eyes the highest earthly prize a man may have.

The wandering railway journey round by Rennes and Caulnes was not to be thought of. I went on to Dol, procured the lightest two-wheeled nondescript vehicle and the strongest horse they had at the Grand Maison, and set off across country to Dinan.

The weather was cold and hard, but there was fortunately no snow, and we rattled and bumped merrily along ways that in a softer time would have been impassable for mud. The fields looked chill and drear and empty, but overhead and on every side, in apple tree and oak, the mistletoe hung thick, in spite of hungry London and the steamer-loads that I had seen going there. And Christmas was only two days ahead, and Marie de Kerhuel's bright face danced in front

of the horse's joggling brown ears, and every clink of the hoof brought me nearer home and my heart's desire.

My driver was a cheerful youth of sixty, with a face like a winter apple, and a flow of talk like the running of water from a tap. He talked incessantly, to myself, and to the horse, and even to the trees and hedges, and finally found his most appreciative listener in himself, and was quite happy all the time. Of all his output I remember only two things. One was a long invective against the Emperor and all his doings, and that was addressed not to me but to the horse. It ran something like this: "Ah-ha, mon p'tit! We shall see, we shall see. There are men and men, and this coquin of an Emperor he is but a man, and not much of a man at that. They are all as rotten as maggoty apples, I tell you, and one can't even make them into cyder. Bon dieu! Put 'em in the mill and grind 'em all up and they'd be good for nothing but manure, and not much good for that. Non, non, it's a different kind of man we need, and all in the good God's time we'll have him. Napoleon? Pfutt!" And so on, and so on. I judged he was a staunch Legitimist, but I preferred my own pleasant thoughts to a discussion in which I should never have got the better of little Red Pippin, so he had it all his own way. And the other thing I recall was his bursting out suddenly: "Say then, Monsieur, what in the name of God do they do with all that mistletoe across there? Do they eat it?"

"No; they dance under it and kiss one another," I said.

"Nom-de-dieu! The heathens! Thank God, we're not like that over here, we others! I made sure they ate it, and I made my old one cook some one day, but it was no good."

We climbed the hill into Dinan at last, and my mother and Joséphine came rushing to my knock on the door.

And then, when Fortune seemed smiling her bravest, and all my world seemed bright and happy, my little sun was clouded. For no sooner were our greetings over than I asked after the folks at Kerhuel, and my mother said, "My dear, I doubt if you will see Marie and her mother. They

were summoned in great haste to Poitou yesterday. Madame's father has had a stroke, and they went off at a moment's notice. They called here in passing, and left their congratulations for you and their regrets at not seeing you, and I am sure they were both very sorry to have to go."

I was very sorry, too, both on their account, seeing the reason for their going, and still more on my own at missing them.

And I did miss them greatly, in spite of all my dear mother could do to make up for their absence. When could a mother quite fill the place of that other one in any son's heart?

That was, without exception, the dreariest and dullest holiday I ever spent. My mother had made many friends. There were bright, handsome, wholesome girls among them, both English and French; but—Marie de Kerhuel was in Poitou, and Brittany was dull without her.

I made the best of a bad job, and lived in the fervent hope that the old gentleman in Poitou would have either a smart recovery or a quick and painless passing. But he perversely did neither. He lingered on in Poitou between life and death, while I tramped the country roads in Brittany in gloomy discontent at his thoughtlessness. If he had only had the consideration to retain his usual health till the Christmas holidays were over, now, I would have thought ever so much more highly of him; or if he had broken down a month earlier, and got through with the business, either one way or the other, I would have been grateful to him.

It takes a larger heart than most men are possessed of to go all round and give full shares to everyone, even to every rightful shareholder. I believe the faculty grows with the years—perhaps the organ also—and that, given the proper kind of heart and the proper kind of treatment—for a beefsteak and a small boy are not the only things in this world which improve with pounding—given these things, a man's heart may before he dies grow large enough for his circumstances. When it happens so we find a very

noble man, and we love him very dearly. Woman's heart one would naturally expect to find larger than man's, and of a finer fibre. As strict matter of fact, however, they are just the same size, and as to fibre I agree with you. But beyond all question it is the woman's heart which pays the largest dividends to its shareholders, which is a very abominable way of putting it, but nevertheless true.

I was, I am afraid, but dull company for my mother that Christmas-tide. But being a woman and my mother, and having, moreover, the inestimable privilege of knowing—nay, much more, of loving—Marie de Kerhuel, she understood and bore with me. And, knowing Marie, and the intention I had had of telling her all that was in my heart, she sympathised keenly with my disappointment, and did her very best to cheer me. If I was not as responsive as I ought to have been, and if her very best did not cheer me greatly—well, I was twenty-one, and my heart was in Poitou. As for my degrees, of which she was so proud, and on which I had been going to stand so firmly, they were but capital letters of the alphabet, and void of ministry to a hungry heart. For any twenty-one-year-older would give all the letters of the alphabet in all their possible combinations for one little word from his mistress's lips.

I walked out several times to Kerhuel and interviewed George, to the detriment of his studies. And always, when I started out, I had the hope that perchance the old gentleman in Poitou had arranged himself—somehow, either one way or the other; I did not much care which—and that I should find Marie returned. And all along the road between the gaunt poplars the hope of it buoyed me up, and let me down with a flop when I reached the château and found only George there; and our intercourse was not enlivening, which perhaps under the circumstances was not surprising.

M. le Curé seemed almost to live there in Madame's absence. At all events, he was there every time I called, assisting George with his studies, I presume.

I found him at all times pleasant and jovial, and quite paternally interested in my own work and progress, and

inclined to hold me up to his pupil as an example to be followed; which disposed George to incivility, and so probably realised the good curé's wishes. I knew perfectly well that his life's object and mine were diametrically opposed, and that he would do everything in his power to thwart me; but his manners were perfect and left nothing to be desired, except the one thing of which no particle entered into his construction—sincerity.

"You have done extremely well, my dear young friend," said he, "and your future is assured. In what fortunate field do you propose to exercise those great talents? There must be no wrapping them up in a napkin, you know. To whom much is given, of him much will be required."

"My future must depend upon circumstances, M. le Curé."

"A talented man is above his circumstances," said the priest. "It is for him to pick and choose, smaller men may take what they can get. Your great city must offer wonderful possibilities for the noblest of all professions—after my own."

I did not by so much as the movement of an eyelash express the opinion that the profession of the Order of Jesus—terrible debasement of that name—was not in my mind the grandest in the world. But by way of ruffling his soul, if that were possible, I said:

"It is possible I may decide to settle in Dinan."

"Never, never, my friend! You would feel yourself buried alive there. The scope would be too limited. It is your bounden duty to seek the wider field."

"Oh, well, we shall see when the time comes," I said.

Very greatly to my surprise, on two occasions I found M. Raoul de Querhoal there also; and the impression I gathered from his words and manner was that he was, in his own peculiar way, cultivating brother George's friendship, with ulterior motives, and that M. le Curé, to serve his own ends, was doing his utmost to assist him.

M. de Querhoal looked down upon us all from a very lofty altitude, and in his manner he made it so offensively

evident that in meeting us he had to step down at least half-way that at times my toes tingled to kick him. If he had condescended to me as he did to George, I doubt if even the inviolability of my neighbour's house would have sufficed to keep my toes off him. George, however, did not seem to feel it so. At all events he showed no signs of resentment. And Godefroi, the elder brother, when he was there, seemed to me to be quite unnecessarily effusive in his welcome of the young man. Of course, as a business man and one of the small proprietors, he may have felt it good policy to put himself on the best possible terms with the coming great man of the country-side. To me, however, feeling as I did, it seemed to indicate but a mean and grovelling spirit, with which I found it impossible to sympathise, more especially in one with whom I hoped to be on more than friendly terms some day. It is quite possible, however, that Godefroi's views on the subject differed from my own in several particulars.

Raoul, with the assistance of M. le Curé, may have understood my general feelings, for he had very little to say to me. And that was perhaps just as well, for I was in a state of simmering disgust with things in general, and it would have taken very little to make the pot boil over and put the fat into the fire.

However, we never came to open dispute, and in the light of after-happenings I was glad that we did not.

I filled in three days by running across to Quercy to see Jean again. He was to have come home, but "unavoidable circumstances," which in my own mind I was able to diagnose pretty well, had prevented him. He managed to get out and join me at the hotel. How he did it he did not explain beyond a wink.

We had a fairly cheerful dinner. Things were no better, he said, but he was getting indurated and used to them. He was greatly delighted at the full account of my rencontre with Sergeant Lebeau, and assured me once more that the matter had had no unpleasant consequences with regard to himself. That too I have since been glad to think of.

He also expressed a fervent wish for the speedy decease of the old gentleman in Poitou.

"He never had experience of the service himself, you see," said Jean. "He said it would make men of us, and we must go through with it. It's like to make something else of some of us. But, do you know, Charles, I have great hopes of a turn-up before long, and that will probably make changes."

"How do you mean?"

"War!" he said.

"War!" I echoed. "Why, with whom?"

"Prussia, of course. You see, I get a good deal of time think about things sometimes. Salle-de-police affords excellent thinking accommodation, if it's not too crowded, and if the others are not too drunk. Solitary confinement is even better still. There there is nothing whatever to disturb one's thoughts except the rats, and you soon get used to them. Bread and water stimulate one's thoughts up to a certain point; after that they get vague and rambling. But I've come to the conclusion that, sooner or later, France and Prussia have got to come to blows. Prussia is growing stronger every day, you see, and I doubt if France will stand that. And then Louis Napoleon's tenure depends on his keeping things humming at high pressure, and lately they've been running down a bit, and he will be on the look out for a lightning conductor outside."

"Well, for everybody's sakes, my boy, we'll hope it won't come to war. If France and Prussia got to loggerheads, I'm afraid the whole of Europe would join in, and there would be some pretty hot work."

"I expect there would. But anything for a change from Quercy. The discontent of the men here is growing to such a point that I should not be surprised any day if it showed head in some unpleasant way. If it is the same elsewhere, and I have no reason to suppose it is not, the authorities will have to find some outlet for it or take the consequences. It would be so very easy for them to improve matters by

some reasonable modifications. But, instead, they seem to think they can keep things quiet by putting the screw on tighter. It is like an engineer sitting on his safety-valve in hopes of keeping down the steam below. Any self-respecting boiler would burst, just to show him what a fool he was."

We did not run across Sergeant Lebeau; and I saw Jean safely back to barracks, and then caught the night train home. And on the road I thought much of all he had said. I decided, however, that so far as international affairs were concerned his views were chimerical, and the result of too much high thought on bread and water in the police cells, and so I did not let them trouble me. As to the state of matters in his own regiment I felt much uneasiness, but purely on his account. If any outbreak occurred, the innocent would as likely as not suffer with the guilty.

Both Madame de Kerhuel and Marie had written to my mother. The old gentleman was picking up again by degrees, but he would not hear of their leaving him; and in due course I had to return to my work in London without ever having seen them, and with all my hopes still at a loose end.

CHAPTER X.

THE BLACK DEED OF QUERCY.

CIRCUMSTANCES enabled me to leave London for the Easter vacation one day before the term actually ended, and within an hour I was on the Southampton train *en route* for Kerhuel and home; and this time I vowed that nothing should prevent me telling Marie all that was in my heart.

But man proposes and God disposes, and matters beyond my imagining awaited me in Brittany.

The country, gleaming like a jewel with the first flushing of the spring, had never seemed so fair and sweet as I travelled up the Rance towards the little city set on a hill, and my heart and hopes beat high.

I had no slightest doubt of the dear girl's feelings towards me. I had looked deep into her eyes, and her eyes were wells of truth and her heart shone up through them. All the same, I ardently desired the sweet, formal confirmation of her lips, and the proper regularisation of our position; and towards that I was travelling as fast as the little steamboat could beat its way up the placid estuary.

"Did you get the letter I forwarded to you?" were my mother's first words when our welcomes were over.

"No. What letter?"

"It was from Quercy, but not, I think, in Jean's writing. It was marked 'Urgent,' and I sent it on instantly. I did not expect you to start before your time, you see."

"From Quercy; and marked urgent?" And my heart gave a great surge of foreboding. "I will go over to Kerhuel at once. I must go. How are they all, mother?"

"All well except Godefroi, who is down with rheumatism."

Godefroi's rheumatism did not greatly trouble me, and after a hasty bite and a wash I started off along the road my heart had travelled oftener even than my feet.

My welcome was entirely to my liking, for Marie saw me

from the window and was standing in the big arched doorway when I reached it. Her face was radiant and beaming, but there was something else in it, and I very soon knew what it was.

"I am enchanted to see you, Monsieur Charles!" she cried. "We were just wishing for you."

"I have been just wishing to be here all the time, Marie. It is nearly six months since I have seen you." And I kissed her hand.

"Oh, but it was on business matters that we have desired you here, mother and I," she said. "Here is maman now." And Madame gave me hearty greeting, with just a touch of preoccupation in her manner, the meaning of which I presently understood.

We chatted for a minute or two about the disappointment of not seeing one another at Christmas time, and then Madame's anxiety found voice.

"Charles, we were just wishing *you* were here when we saw you coming up the road. Will you do something for us?"

"Need you ask, dear Madame? There is no possible thing you could ask which I would not joyfully do for you."

Ah, me! Joyfully! Well, you will see.

"Godefroi is laid up with rheumatism. He cannot travel, and he has this morning received this from Quercy." And she pulled out a pale blue slip of a telegram and handed it to me. It was addressed to Godefroi, and ran:

"Please come here at once.—George."

And, knowing so much more than they did, my heart curdled suddenly with fear, and it was more than I could do to keep it quite out of my face—to Marie's eyes at all events. With Madame I was perhaps more successful.

"But I will go at once, dear Madame," I said. "I shall enjoy seeing the boys. It is probably only some scrape they have got into, and they want the big brother to help them out."

"You will eat with us before you leave?" said Madame, rising with hospitable housewifely intentions.

"I think not, dear Madame. I have just eaten at home, and if I hurry now I can perhaps catch the two o'clock diligence to Caulnes, which will save much time; and the sooner I go, the sooner I shall get back."

"It is very good of you to take so much trouble on our account," said Madame; "and that when you have only this moment arrived."

"Trouble on your account, dear Madame, becomes a veritable pleasure. I shall hope to be allowed to take much more."

I was.

Marie accompanied me to the door, and went a short way down the path with me. When we were out of earshot of the house she turned to me, and I saw fear in her eyes; the reflection of that which I had tried to keep out of my own face.

"Charles, my friend, what is it you fear?" she asked, almost breathlessly.

"I do not know, Marie. It may be nothing, it may be anything. Whatever it is, oh, my dearest, remember that my heart beats only for you and yours, and my dear mother. I would give my life to save you from trouble."

"You think it may be trouble?" she asked, with many emotions working in her face.

"I have no right to say so."

"But in your heart you fear so?"

"My heart is heavy, I don't know why."

I stood holding her hand, very reluctant to leave her so, yet very desirous of not obtruding myself when her heart was troubled. But the sight of her sweet, bright face, all sunshine and shadow, was too much for me. I grasped the other little hand and looked deep down into the swimming dark eyes.

"Dearest," I said, in jerks that came from the bottom of my heart, "give me the right to help you at all times, and to comfort you if trouble comes. You are dearer to me than all the world—from the very first day I saw you."

I saw all I wanted in her eyes, but she gave me more.

She drew her hands away, and put them round my neck and raised her face to my kisses.

"God keep you, dearest. Come what may, we belong to one another," I said; and I kissed her again and again.

"Now go, my dear," she said at last. "And do your best for us, whatever it is. My heart tells me it is trouble."

She turned and went slowly back towards the house, and I got a last benedictory wave of the hand as I stood for a moment at the corner of the high road.

Two hours later I was sitting alongside the driver in the coupé of the cumbersome old vehicle which formed the southern link between Dinan and the world. And if my heart beat full and high at thought of the dear girl from whom I was speeding as fast as two bony steeds could carry me, it ran slow and heavy at thought of what they were carrying me to. For that there was trouble at Quercy, and trouble out of the common, I felt convinced.

If only I had received that letter! It was me they wanted. The telegram to Godefroi was a last resort. It was from George; the letter also, undoubtedly, since my mother said it was not in Jean's writing. It was our dear Jean, then, who was in trouble. What could it possibly be?

The fates were against me. We had been bumping along for an hour or so, and the roads were heavy with the softness of the spring. In spite of the roughness of the journey and all that was in my heart, I had sunk into a half-doze, for I had not slept a wink the night before on the boat. I heard the driver chirruping and talking to his horses; and then there came an earthquake, and we were flung almost on to the joggling backs of the suddenly-stopped steeds.

The driver climbed down, dribbling imprecations, reported the front axle broken, and sat down on a heap of road metal to scratch his head and coin a new set of expletives adequate to the occasion. A very brief examination told me that that diligence was anchored there till a smith came to it, so I decided to do at once what the rest of the company would have to do when they had settled matters with the driver. I left him the vehement centre of a still

more excited circle, who were all insisting on a return of their money equivalent to the unperformed part of their journey, which seemed reasonable enough. On the other hand, the driver maintained that they had paid to be taken to Caulnes, and to Caulnes he would take them, as soon as his diligence was repaired; but as for refunding any money—*Sacristi! Sapristi! Sacré nom-de*—everything he could put his tongue to! He'd see them there and further first, before he'd do anything of the kind.

I offered to carry his mails to Caulnes, if he would lend me one of the Rosinantes which stood contentedly by the roadside pending settlement. But after a moment's consideration he decided that the whole affair was a deep-laid scheme on my part to get possession of both the horse and the mails. So I struck off at once on my two hours' walk, seeing plainly that this would throw all my train connections awry, and make me much later than I expected in arriving at Quercy.

As a matter of fact, it was three o'clock in the morning when I tumbled out of the train there, more than half asleep, and limp with the long, cramping ride.

At eight o'clock I was outside the barrack gate. There was a crowd of blue blouses and white starched caps hanging round it. As I came up, the cathedral boomed out the hour, and mingling with its last notes came a dull roar of musketry from inside the barracks.

At sound of that the crowd gave a great "Huh!"—between a sigh and a sob—and the grizzled lips of the men dribbled curses.

"What is going on?" I asked of the nearest blouse.

"Par-die, M'sieur, these pigs of military are shooting a man in there." And a chill of apprehension stabbed me like an icicle in the heart.

"What are they shooting him for?" I made shift to ask.

"Sacrés cochons! Because he was a man, and they are pigs. And I, I also have a son in there. Maybe they'll shoot him next."

"What is the name of the man they are shooting?" I asked.

"Mon dieu! I know not, Monsieur. But it is not Pierre Callou, and that is my boy, for I have seen him this morning." And he continued cursing the military with extreme vigour, a proceeding which afforded him much relief, but gave me no information. Fear was in my heart, and until I saw and spoke to my friends that fear would remain.

I did not know what might be the usual course of procedure. The most sensible thing seemed to be to ask at headquarters. So I passed the gloomy sentry and walked down the arched passage that led to the barrack square. The gates were left open—purposely, perhaps, to afford the blue blouses a glimpse of the power of their masters. Inside the square I could see serried lines of men standing motionless.

There was an open door on my left. I looked in. It was evidently the guardroom. There were muskets in racks, a plain deal table, and some wooden chairs. The guard had evidently slipped round the corner to miss nothing of what was going on. I stepped inside to await the arrival of someone in authority. A bugle rang out, and the square was filled with the sound of marching feet, and the guard came slipping back into the room. They looked at me in silence, but said nothing even to one another. There was an air of depression abroad. I waited quietly for the officer of the guard to come in.

And as I waited I saw ghosts.

Past the open door of the room in which I stood went Raoul de Querhoal and M. le Curé Lesieur, arm in arm.

M. le Curé's face was paler than usual. The struggle for predominance between the white and the red gave it a mottled appearance, and it lacked its usual joviality. There was a fixity of expression on it, nearly approaching to hardness, which I had never seen before, but which I could well have imagined if I had been spared the sight.

Raoul's face was pale, too. It always was pale, but now its unhealthy pallor seemed deepened with a touch of lead. He seemed by no means depressed, however. On the contrary, as they passed the door he made some remark to the

Curé, with a twisted smile on his lips; it might be to show his nonchalant contempt to, and of, the waiting crowd outside. M. Lesieur, I think, made no reply, but I could see the jaw inside the shaven cheek nearest to me clenching and working inside the skin.

What brought these two there together, I wondered! And then a sergeant came brusquely in with the appearance of making up by an excess of severity for a moment of relaxation.

"Hola!" he said roughly, at sight of me. "What the devil do you want here?"

It was my old enemy, Sergeant Lebeau, whose nose and eye had felt my fists in the café. He had not forgotten me.

"I came to visit a friend, Monsieur," I said; "and not knowing the usual course of procedure I came in here to ask."

"Well, get out and go to the devil," he said.

"May I inquire——"

"Get out, or the guard shall put you out."

I turned to the door. As I stepped into the tunnel-way I was so fortunate as to meet that other big sergeant who had once before stood my friend.

"Ah, M. le Sergeant," I said, raising my hat with all the politeness a vehement desire to kick Sergeant Lebeau had left in me; "may I solicit your good offices for one moment?"

He looked at me for a moment, and then a grim smile broke on his face. "Ah, I remember. But certainly, Monsieur. What can I do for you?"

"I came to visit some friends here, but I don't know how to set about it."

"Much better let your friends visit you outside, Monsieur," he said, with another reminiscent grin, as much as to say, "We don't keep champagne in barracks. Your friends will profit more by coming outside."

"But who is it you wish to see?" he said. "I shall be happy to oblige Monsieur by informing them, and no doubt they can get leave."

"It is the Messieurs de Kerhuel I wish to see."

"Ah!" he said with sudden gravity; and regarded me

fixedly for a moment. Then he added, "If Monsieur will return to his hotel, I will see to the matter."

"I am greatly indebted to you, M. le Sergeant," I said. "I am at the Hôtel de France. I will await my friends there."

He bowed without speaking, and I raised my hat and went out among the blue blouses.

It was a gloriously bright morning; not a cloud in the blue sky, and the sun beat warmly on the white, green-latticed houses, and flashed up from the water as I crossed the bridge. It was market day; the country folk were jogging in from all parts in their green-tilted carts laden with produce; the ladies of the town were hurrying to and fro with their white-capped bonnes, intent on their marketing; all the town was alive and humming merrily. But my heart was chill with the fear of I knew not what, and I shivered in spite of the sun.

As I passed along the colonnade of the square I caught sight of Raoul and the curé again. They were sitting at a table in one of the cafés, close to the window, with wine in front of them. Raoul was smoking a cigarette with his eyes fixed on M. Lesieur, who was talking earnestly to him. They were too much occupied to see me, and I passed on to the hotel. I ordered a private room, and told the waiter to set covers for three, and we would take what the house could give us when my friends arrived.

But they were long of coming; very long of coming. Ah, me! Yes, truly, very long of coming.

But, at last, after two hours of impatience, during which I walked at least eight miles of well-waxed wood floor, and got to know the peculiarities of every plank therein, there came a tap at the door and George came in—alone.

Stay! Was it George? I hardly knew him. His face was ghastly white, his eyes red all round, like the eyes of a bloodhound—like old Bar's eyes, but burning with furious fire inside. He stood and looked at me, and I at him, for a moment. He was so very unlike the George I had hitherto known.

"You have come!" he said hoarsely at last.

"I have come at the first moment I heard I was wanted, George. Where is Jean?"

He dropped into the nearest chair by the table. His eye glanced at the three covers.

"You have not heard?"

"I have heard nothing. Tell me quick."

For answer he flung his arms out over the table, never heeding what was on it, and dropped his head upon them, helmet and all, and sobbed in a fury of heart-break that dims my eyes when I think of it after all these years.

It was agonising to witness, and to lack the knowledge of what it all meant.

"George," I said, shaking him roughly by the shoulder, "tell me at once what is the matter. Do you hear? Tell me."

He shook and choked with his sobs so that he could hardly draw breath. I was prepared for the worst, the very worst, before he gasped, in a hoarse and broken voice:

"He is dead. They shot him this morning. Oh, the devils, the devils, the devils! May God's curse blight them for ever and evermore!"

Jean dead! Shot this morning!

I sat down in my misery and stared dumbly at the shaking figure in front of me.

Jean, our Jean—dead! Shot this morning!

I thought of the dear ones at Kerhuel, and my heart lay within me like a lump of frozen ashes.

How long we sat thus I know not. Years of misery it seemed; and then the waiter came in to ask if he should bring up breakfast.

He retired hastily at the hoarse "Allez!" I fired at him. Then I got up and locked the door.

Marie—and his mother! My God! How tell them this awful thing that had come upon us?

I sat again, in dull, stupid horror. I was roused by the crash of George's helmet as he flung it into a corner. He pitched his sabre into another corner, and wrenched open

his tunic—all in quick, spasmodic jerks, which told of jangled nerves and loosened grip.

A crushing blow contains anæsthetic qualities for the mind as for the body. The pain comes with the awakening.

While yet my mind was numb with the blow, I had the hardihood to drag the story out of George, bit by bit, till I thought I understood the whole—the whole, at all events, of the bare, tragic, surface facts.

For him it was like the probe searching round a raw wound. The nerves were tender, and shrank beneath my touch; but my feelings were still dulled, and I questioned him relentlessly. He angered under the process, but not with me—with the maker of the wound.

This is what he told me, as nearly as possible in his own words, though it came out in disconnected jerks; now a furious outbreak—molten lava out of a volcano, now a single word, and many bitter curses.

"The very day I arrived here," he said, "that devil Raoul arrived also. He had got his step and been transferred as captain to our regiment. No, that was Fate. He could not possibly have arranged it so. He is a devil, but he shall not escape. From the very first he set himself to make us as uncomfortable as he possibly could. Before God, I believe now he did it to bring about the very thing that has happened. Why? Well, because he hated the very name of Kerhuel. He wanted to marry Marie, as you must know. M. le Curé desired it also. But maman and Marie would have none of him. He tried very hard, when they returned from Poitou, for permission to pay his addresses to her. Marie at last told him she hated the very sight of him. Maman bade him trouble them no more. She told him she would sooner see Marie dead than married to him, and that ended it. I thought they were wrong; so did Godefroi. M. le Curé was much put out. It made trouble at home; and when Raoul came here we knew it would make trouble here also. Jean never ceased to urge upon me to keep myself in check, and quietly put up with any and every annoyance and insult, since only worse could come of

126[illegible]B

resenting it. For himself, he said, he was case-hardened and could stand anything. We had much to put up with. That conceited little devil seemed to single us out for punishment on every possible and impossible pretext. The more we put up with the worse he got, till things became almost unbearable. Understand, the others suffered also, for he is an insufferable little martinet in his way. Not a man but hated him worse than death. But we two suffered most. We hated him most and we showed it least. Before God, I tell you, Charles, we did our very best to do our duty. But it was punishment, punishment, punishment all the time; week in week out, night and day. I was on forage fatigue last Monday morning; it is terribly hard work to one who is not strong enough for it. I did my best, but it was too much for me. I was nearly broken in two. My load fell. It was impossible. Raoul stood by enjoying it. Jean was watching too, as he always did, to help me all he could. He came forward to give me a hand. Raoul ordered him away, and bade two of the others pile the load on my back again. I fell under it. Raoul laughed and swore at me for an imbecile. Sergeant Lebeau, who had charge of our squad, said I could carry it if I chose. I was sulky, he said, and was always trying to shirk. God knows it was not true, I have done my best. Raoul declared I should carry that load if it broke my back. I was afraid to look at Jean. I tried again, till my heart felt like bursting. I fell again, and Raoul regarded it as a great joke. 'It will break the Kerhuel spirit, if it doesn't break the Kerhuel back,' he said. And the next minute it was all done. Raoul was on his back on the ground, with Jean blazing over him. My God! That was the end. They shot him before us all this morning. Did I say the end? It was Raoul de Querhoal murdered him. I will never rest till I have his blood. Why did you not come, Charles? He begged me to send for you. He wished to see you once more."

"I never got your letter," I said. "It was sent on to England, and I had left the day before. Your telegram to Godefroi was the first intimation I had of anything being wrong."

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu! Who will tell our mother and Marie?" And he got up and paced the room like a caged beast.

He was standing for a moment, gazing vaguely out of the window into the street, when I heard in a hoarse whisper:

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu!" And I saw him stiffen suddenly. "Sacré nom-de-diable!" And he bent forward and glared out of the window, in an attitude and with something of a look in him that stirred vague recollections in my mind.

I knew what I should see when I reached his side. Perhaps I did not sound the full depth of his thoughts.

M. le Curé was coming down the street with Raoul. It was quite likely he was stopping at the Hôtel de France. The strain which was on them when they passed out of the barracks was no longer visible; they had doubtless left it behind them at the café. The curé's face had resumed its jovial red. He smiled at some remark which his companion passed with a laugh. I heard George's teeth grinding at my side, and curses hissing in his lips. It seemed as though the intensity and venom of his gaze struck the priest like a blow. He glanced up and round, as one looks when struck by a missile; and his eyes and George's met. What passed in that glance—some of what passed, and passed in more senses than one—I have since imagined; but at most only in part.

M. le Curé's face, however, lengthened into sudden seriousness, and he drew slightly apart from Raoul. They passed out of sight below us. George continued to glare through the window as though he saw them still. Doubtless he saw much, and inwardly much more. But even he could not see all.

Presently, as I anticipated, there came a tap at the door.

"Shall I admit him?" I said.

"No," he snapped.

I unlocked the door and confronted the priest.

"Ah, Monsieur Glyn! It is good of you to have come to comfort us in this trying time," he said, in the most sympathetic of tones, and made as though to pass in.

"You cannot enter, M. le Curé," I said. "George desires to see no one."

"Of course, of course. I understand. But he will see me."

"I think not."

"Oh, nonsense! Who should administer consolation to him better than myself? Permit me, Monsieur."

Without resort to physical force I could not have kept him out. He pushed past me and entered the room.

"My poor boy——" he began, as he went forward to George.

"Get out!" A voice? George's voice? A wild beast snarl rather.

"My poor George——"

"Damn you! Get out! Go back to your murderer down below."

The curé's face was white enough now—approaching the colour of Raoul's when he left the barracks.

"George——" he began once more.

"Will you go? Nom-de-dieu! Where is my sword? I will hack you in pieces."

He sprang for his sword, and dragged it rattling out of its sheath; but before it was clear the curé was out of the room, and I locked the door again.

George flung sword and scabbard in a jangling heap to the floor, and sat down at the table with his head in his hands. For a full hour he neither moved nor spoke. At intervals a shuddering sigh broke from him. And so I sat and watched the dissolution of a man's whole moral nature—a sight I never wish to see again.

In that short hour—in that hour as a climax to the rest, at all events—every feeling and fibre of his soul made a complete *volte-face*. Every hope and aspiration died within him. Nay, I am wrong; the hopes and aspirations he had still, but they had swung round like a warped compass to a false pole. His soul died within him, and he sold the dead thing to the devil. And I? Yes, I knew it; and I had no comfort for him. It was infinitely past all words. And

my own heart was filled with rage and fury equal to his own. He must have known it, for when at last he lifted up his face it was to say, in a hoarse whisper:

"Promise me you will not touch him!"

I looked back at him. No need to ask whom.

"He is mine," he said. "I will have him. If you come between us, I will kill you."

I do not know what kind of leave George had that day, but he remained with me till the call rang out in the square; and before the trumpeters reached the hotel we were on our way to barracks. He had spoken very little during the latter part of the day, but the privacy of the room, where his humour could give free rein to its grief and hate, was what he needed most. We ate, but for myself it all tasted like ashes, and the wine that washed it down was the more acceptable faring.

When we reached the barrack gate he wrung my hand with a nervous, clinging grip, as though he were not quite sure what would become of him when he loosed it.

"Go home, Charles," he said, still holding my hand, "and marry Marie. He greatly desired it."

"I am going to, George," I said.

"And, remember, *he* is mine, and you are not to interfere."

"Promise me, at all events, that you won't do anything rash. Remember Marie and your mother."

"I promise you I won't do anything rash," he said; and turned and went down the tunnel.

And, as I went slowly and sadly back to the hotel, I could not help thinking that any insurance company which, with a knowledge of the facts of the case, would guarantee one centime on the life of Captain Raoul de Querhoal, over and above the amount of any premium he might pay, would be embarking on an exceedingly hazardous speculation.

CHAPTER XI.

SHADED LIGHTS.

And now I had before me surely as hard and painful a task as ever was imposed upon a man.

As I travelled slowly homewards, the slow train seemed to fly at express speed, and for once as I journeyed towards Kerhuel my heart lagged behind my body.

How to tell that terrible story without breaking their hearts I knew not, and I racked my brain to little purpose to the endless rhythm of the clanking wheels.

"*Jean is dead! Jean is dead! Jean is dead!*" groaned the wheels. "*Break their hearts! Break their hearts! Break their hearts!*"

And I was no nearer the solution of my difficulties when I dropped from the diligence at Dinan than I had been when I wrung George's hand at the barrack gates at Quercy; except, indeed, that I had decided to take my mother's opinion as to how to do what I had to do. In such matters a woman's heart is worth ten men's heads.

No doubt I looked woebegone and wretched enough, for I had suffered much, and had had next to no sleep for three days. The moment my mother set eyes on me she cried out, and drew me swiftly into the room and shut the door.

"My boy, what is it?" she cried. And I told her the whole dreadful story.

"My poor Anna! Oh, my poor Anna!" she cried. "And our dear Marie! It is very terrible, Charles."

"I do not know how to tell them, mother. It will break their hearts."

"It has got to be told, my dear, and the sooner the better. They are in a state of very great anxiety. Marie was here yesterday. You must eat, and then we will go to them at once."

I was trying in vain to find some taste in the things she set

before me, when, after much pondering, she suddenly burst out, somewhat inconsequently as it seemed to me:

"Charles, I see the priest in all this."

But I shook my head. In the general upsetting of my thoughts the same idea had occurred to me; but it was too terrible, and I had refused to give it place. I was not surprised at her remark, however, for I knew her detestation of M. le Curé and all his kind.

Eastern rulers used to shear off the heads of the bearers of evil tidings, and the commission to carry such news was equivalent to a sentence of death. I felt in very similar case as we drove between the long lines of funereal poplars to Kerhuel that bright spring morning.

Marie saw us from afar, and she was waiting at the door when we drove up. There was a light of welcome in her eyes, but in manner she was nervous and depressed, as I had never seen her before. She had already gathered from our faces, and perhaps from the fact of my mother's presence, that we brought bad news.

"Dear child!" said my mother tenderly, as she embraced her. "Take me to your mother, Marie."

"Is it Jean?" asked Marie, in a whisper.

"Yes, dear, it is Jean. He is gone. You must do your best to comfort your mother."

"Come!" said Marie, quietly. "Poor mother!" and led the way into the room.

"Anna, my dear, dear friend, I bring you the saddest of news," I heard my mother say. Then Marie caught me by the hand, and drew me along the passage to a smaller room at the back, which looked out over the garden and the fields.

"Tell me all, Charles—all," she said; and sank weeping into a chair.

And, holding her hand in mine, I told her the whole sad story. And the fluttering starts and twitches of the docile little hand told me how her tender heart was wounded at the telling. She bore it bravely, however, and her chief thought was all for her mother.

"We will go in presently, when the first bitterness of it

We stopped all that saddest of days at Kerhuel, ministering such consolation as our friendly presence might, for in face of so dire and final a calamity words were a mockery; and in the evening we went sadly home, suffering much at thought of the broken hearts we left behind.

It was a very quiet holiday I spent that Easter, and yet the sorrowful time was shot with gleams of gold.

While Madame de Kerhuel was still burdened with her sorrow I could not with decency beg her to confirm my happiness by her formal consent to the betrothal of Marie and myself; but, in spite of our own deep grief, we two found much quiet joy in one another's company. Perhaps our happiness was even deepened by its sorrowful setting.

I stayed a week beyond the beginning of the term, and found it very hard to have to go even then.

As I was bidding Marie and her mother good-bye on the last evening, Madame held my hand as though loth to let me go; as though, after what she had just passed through, she feared even this brief parting with a friend. Almost before I knew it the words were out of my mouth:

"Dear Madame, will you take me for a son in place of him we have lost? Marie is dearer to me than my life."

She drew me to her and kissed me on the cheek.

"Yes," she said very quietly. "I am glad. There is no one to whom I would so gladly trust her. May the good God keep you both, and give you every happiness."

And so the crown of my life came to me—through no merits of my own, but through sorrow and trouble and bitter loss, and the shedding of innocent blood. But as yet I was only heir apparent. Before the crown was on my brow many strange things were to happen, and there was much to be endured; for we stood on the edge of a volcano, and the strange hidden forces had long been at work, making slowly and surely for the great catastrophe.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EAGLES' GATHERING.

I WENT back to my work in London in the comforting hope that after so bitter a time of trouble the proverbial calm would follow. We had paid tribute to Fortune; surely we might now hope for recompense to the extent, at all events, of a peaceful permission to work out our destinies with no undue harassments. Our eyes eagerly sought primroses on the path, and found and rejoiced in them. But the path is a crooked one at best, and full of turnings, and at times every turning holds and hides its own surprise. So it was for us in our small way, and so it was for much greater personages than we; for it was a time of convulsion, a time of downsetting and uprising in high places, with all the concomitant suffering in the smaller places—a time of blood and horror. And the mighty wheel was already beginning to turn.

I made a point of writing as cheery a letter to George every week as I could possibly put together, and I never ceased to urge upon him the duty he owed his mother and sister of keeping himself well in hand, lest their lives should be still further burdened. I heard from him pretty regularly in reply, and received, with much thankfulness, the news that since Jean's death his lot had been less rigorous. Whether Raoul de Querhoal had been somewhat overcome with the result of his previous bullying, or whether he feared that a continuance of it might drive George to some desperate act in which he himself would pay the final penalty, George could not say; but it was certain that, as regarded himself, Raoul kept at a distance. "The others, however," said George, "are having a devil of a time of it." With the others I had no personal concern. It was enough for me to know that George himself was getting on better, and not being, at the moment at all events, hounded to death as Jean had been.

I was grinding away at my books one afternoon in my gloomy rooms in Grafton Street. It was hot and dusty outside; it was hot and grimy inside, in spite of a light and airy costume and a window as wide open as its sagged sash would permit. I heard a watering cart rumble splashing along the street; I could smell the mixed odours of the dust its passage raised. Then a small boy tore past with an early evening paper. He was yelling at top of his raucous little pipe, and something in the accents of his unknown tongue sent me flying to the window, and then into coat and waistcoat, and down into the street. The boy had gone like a fiery cross to rouse the inhabitants of the West. I captured another, and eagerly scanned the paper.

For days past the political atmosphere had been in a state of electric suspense. The financial pulse and nerves had had a bad attack of flutters. There had been a wild panic on the Stock Exchange. But we said to ourselves that war between France and Germany, on so flimsy a pretext as the offer of the Spanish crown to Leopold of Hohenzollern, was impossible. And, besides, Leopold had behaved extremely well and had refused it. What more could the Emperor want? Poor old fellow! How little he knew, and how much less anyone else knew!

We may take it, I suppose, now, that all he wanted was to sit as quietly in his uncomfortable chair as his tortured body would permit him. But his chair was in the crater, and, whatever else he did not know, he knew that the crust was terribly thin, and that the fires beneath were raging furiously. He could feel them in his thin dress shoes even through the polished floors of St. Cloud and the Tuileries. The fires must be drawn if there was not to be an explosion. There was only one way. Poke a hole through the side of the crater—the side towards Prussia—and let the hot lava run into the Rhine.

It was the 16th of July, 1870, and the paper I held, under the terse and fateful heading, "WAR!" said:

"The die is cast. The two most powerful armies of modern times are rapidly arraying themselves against each

other. The eventual result is beyond all power of prophecy."

I was still staring doubtingly at the paper, and reading the words over and over again, when a big hand smote me on the back, and a cheery voice cried in my ear, "Well, old man, when do we start?"

"Start for where?" I asked, recognising in voice and hand the greeting of the closest friend I had made in the schools—Hugh Myrtle.

How well I remember his first appearance in the operating-room. I was fairly case-hardened, but the subject that day was peculiarly ghastly, and trying even to the more experienced nerves. The dark-haired new-comer's bright, eager face had attracted me as soon as I set eyes on it. He was short and sturdy; his eyes were fixed intently on the table; his jaw was set with great determination. He stood next to me, and I saw the colour ebb out of his cheeks. I saw his lips whiten and felt him shiver. I slipped my arm through his and round his back, and whispered, "She does not feel it, and it may save her life." He gave me a quick, grateful glance, and then suddenly all his weight was on my arm. I held him quietly—he was not the first I had held so—and presently he came to and stood on his own legs. I lost some of the demonstration, but found a friend; and we had been friends ever since. His parents lived in Sumatra, and he was going back there when he had taken his degrees. He had large, flexible hands, and in course of time became unusually skilful with the knife. He had also a ready pen, and contributed to a number of journals, medical and otherwise, chiefly, however, from love of the work, for his folk were wealthy. He was possessed of a cheerful and lively disposition, and soon had hosts of friends.

"There's only one place that holds any attraction for you and me, Glyn, and that's where the fighting's going to be," he said briskly.

"That so?"

"Of course. Where the carcasses are, there will go-

ahead medicals be gathered together. The word translated 'eagle' means, in the original, 'a picker at dead bodies.'"

"Really? How learned we've become all of a sudden. And where do you intend to strike for?"

"We can be in Paris by to-morrow morning, and work up to the front behind the troops. There'll be no lack of subjects, my boy."

"You little ghoul. You dream subjects, I believe."

"I do sometimes. I've done some marvellous things in dreams; things that would make old M.'s eyes drop right out."

"And the subjects?"

"Oh, well, I generally woke. Say, you'll have sunstroke if you stop here much longer without a hat. Then I'll have to take you in hand. I should——"

"No, thanks; I'll go in and save you the trouble. Coming up?"

"Of course; that's what I came for. Got a railway guide inside?"

"Yes, I've got a guide; but my way won't lie towards Paris. Not first, at all events."

"Oh, come, Glyn! You're not going to chuck me?"

"Not a bit, my boy; but I'm more concerned for the living than for the future dead at present. My mother is in Brittany, you know; and I have other friends there too."

"I see. Is she in Brittany too?"

"Who?"

"Why, she. The nearer one still, and the dearer one yet than all other."

"Yes, she's in Brittany."

"Oh, well, Brittany's as safe as a pump. The fighting will be along the Rhine—the other side of it most likely."

"All the same, I shall go over to Brittany first, whatever I do afterwards."

"It's a deuce of a way round, but I don't mind coming with you, just to take care of you. I'd like to see your mother, Glyn. It's such a while since I've seen my own, that a sight of someone else's will be better than nothing."

"All right, my boy; she'll make you very welcome; but our habits are very simple, so don't expect any of the Eastern magnificence you revel in in Sumatra."

"I've an idea your mother will be very like my own; that's why I want to see her."

"Then I congratulate you, my boy. A good woman makes a difference in any man's life; two make a still greater."

"I suppose so; I've only got as far as one yet. No doubt the other will come some time. Pass that tobacco, will you, please. It's a long way behind what we get in Sumatra, but I'm getting used to it. There'll be some hot work over there when they come to grips, Charley. We'll get experience enough for a lifetime."

"What's your idea, Myrtle? To attach yourself to an ambulance, or go on your own hook?"

"Oh, on my own hook, of course. I want to see as much as I possibly can see. It's the chance of a lifetime. They're always short-handed, you know, and they'll be glad of help when the rush comes."

We were off by that night's boat, and were in Dinan before second breakfast next morning.

My mother was delighted to see us. Her delight was tempered, however, when we explained our intentions, but she made no attempt to divert us from our plans. My friend had been charmed with St. Malo—with the distant view of it, at all events. Closer acquaintance with its narrow, none too sweet streets, as we sought coffee and rolls at the Franklin, subdued his exuberance somewhat. But the sail up the Rance, and the rustic antiquity of Dinan revived his delight to the full. He and my mother proved mutually satisfactory to one another, and I left them together to consolidate their friendship while I walked over to Kerhuel to see Marie and her mother.

It was more than three months since I had seen them. My heart swelled till it felt too large for its casing at the glad welcome that shone from Marie's great dark eyes when she saw me.

They were sitting in the small room at the back, looking out on to the garden and the fields and woods. I got into the house without their knowing it, and, with a tap on the door, went in.

Marie sprang up and at me with a delighted. "Charles!" And Madame's welcome, if more subdued, was none the less cordial.

"And what has brought you here, Charles?" asked Marie.

"You," I said, as she settled herself again on a footstool at her mother's feet.

"Of course; I wonder that did not strike me. But have you been turned out of the college and the hospital? This isn't vacation."

"No; I've come over with a friend. We're going to the front, if they'll let us, to render what assistance we can—to the wounded, of course, I mean."

"Ah, me! The war!" said Madame, with a little shiver. "Is it quite certain, Charles? Will Prussia dare to fight France? Is there no hope of her backing out at the last moment?"

"I fear not, dear Madame. I fear this is one of the wars that has to be. The pretext is flimsy and stupid, and utterly inadequate. The actual causes go very much deeper. Prussia has grown too big and too fast for France's equanimity. Do you know, our dear Jean foresaw all this long since."

"Jean?" exclaimed Marie.

"Yes; he told me it would have to come to this, that first time I went to Quercy."

"My poor boy!" said Madame; and I saw that her loss was still heavy on her. The signs of suffering were very visible. There were more grey hairs among the black, and her face was thinner and sadder than ever I had seen it, and she confessed that she had not been feeling up to the mark for some time past. I could imagine, too, how this new turn of events would bring new anxieties on George's account.

I inquired for the latest news concerning him.

"We had a letter this morning," said Marie; "just a few lines saying he was well, and they were all looking forward to the war as a change for the better. He is at Chalons. His regiment was ordered there a week ago."

"I have given up all hope of ever seeing him again, Charles," said Madame quietly; and Marie patted the hand she held against her cheek.

"Oh, but there is no need for that," I assured her. "There will be hard fighting, no doubt, but everyone is not going to be killed, and George has as good a chance as any of them. He might go through the whole campaign without a scratch——"

"Impossible!" said Madame, with conviction.

"Or he might be wounded in the first encounter and invalided home for you to nurse," I went on.

"It is too good to hope for," said Madame. "He will, I fear, be killed in the very first battle; and only you two will be left to me." And Marie gently kissed the hand she held.

"How is M. Grandpapa, in Poitou?" I asked, by way of diversion.

But this was no happier a subject. "He is alive," she said, with a shake of the head, "but not much more. Sorrows are multiplied all round."

"You don't think the Prussians will ever get here, do you, Charles?" asked Marie.

"No, I don't see what would bring them round here, even if they could get here, which is not at all likely."

"They haven't any fleet, have they? They won't come steaming up the Rance and blow us all to pieces?"

"Compared with France, they have no fleet at all. So you need have no fears, my dear. All the fighting will be on land, and far enough away from Brittany."

"How will it all end?" said Marie.

"Ah, now you are getting beyond my depth. The end is beyond any man's telling."

"M. Renel was here yesterday," said Marie, "and he says France will reap as she has sown."

"Meaning——?"

"She has sown the wind. The harvest is the whirlwind. M. le Pasteur was not too encouraging, for once."

"And what does M. le Curé say?"

"M. le Curé? M. le Curé has not been here since——" And I understood.

"Bring your friend to-morrow, Charles," she said presently. "I would like to see if he is the kind of young man I can safely trust you with."

"He is a capital fellow, as straight as a die; and very quick and clever at amputations and such things."

"Horrible! I don't think I shall like him."

"Oh, yes, you will. It is better to cut off a man's arm or leg than let him die with it on; and it is better to be quick than to be slow. We are looking forward to a lot of experience at the front."

"Horrible!" she said again. "As Charles Glyn, I like you; as the cutter-off of men's arms and legs—non!" With a very decided shake of the head.

We all went out on the morrow. Marie approved of Myrtle. She found something in his honest eyes and dark complexion and sturdy shape that reminded her of Jean. I had often thought the same. As for the impression she herself made on my friend, Myrtle could not find words on our way home to express what he felt. He naïvely confessed himself over head and ears in love with her.

"My God, Glyn!" he said to me that night. "If I could find any girl to care for me as Miss Marie cares for you, I'd go to hell for her."

"The expression is forcible," I said, "but extremely silly. Girls like Marie de Kerhuel don't want you to go to hell for them. Besides, there isn't another like her."

"That's so," he said despondently. "But you know what I mean."

"Yes, I know; and you'll find her in time, old boy, without going so far as that."

Nevertheless, the time came when I went to hell for Marie de Kerhuel.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW WE WENT TO THE FRONT, AND CAME OUT THE BACK WAY.

I CALLED that night on my old friend M. Renel, and had a long chat with him as to the prospects of the war, and more particularly as to our own chances of being allowed to proceed to the front. As to the first, the little Reformed pastor's mind was quite made up; and if his conclusions were based rather on ethical considerations than on military knowledge —and we were all at that time, from Louis Napoleon himself down to M. Renel, wofully ignorant of either our own or the enemy's resources—they had, at all events, the merit of eventually proving absolutely correct.

"The Germans fear God, and live sound and clean," said M. Renel, didactically. "We—I mean as a nation—do not, and we shall pay for it. Rottenness has eaten into the bones of our national life, and the strongest side will win. There will be terrible work, I fear; but I doubt they will be too stuck-up and pig-headed to accept your assistance. I will give you, M. Charles, a letter to my dear friend and colleague in Paris, M. Jean Dellieu. It is possible he may be able to help you. If he can, he certainly will."

And the following day, with M. Renel's letter in my pocket, we two set off for Paris, *en route* for the front, should Providence and the authorities and M. Jean Dellieu enable us to get so far.

We found Paris suffering from delirium—delirium tremens, Myrtle would have it, with a dash of hysteria and symptoms of convulsions. He advised bleeding as an alleviative, but that big job was not for us. We sought out M. Jean Dellieu, and found him a capital fellow—a M. Renel on a somewhat larger scale. We explained our wishes, and he entered into our views with enthusiasm, and set about furthering them to the best of his powers. He was a widower, and lived in a little flat in the Rue S. Dominique, not far from the Invalides. He put a bedroom at our dis-

posal, and begged us to make his house our home till he had arranged our affairs for us. The situation was fairly central, we wanted to see all that was going on, and we accepted his offer with gratitude.

The good M. Dellieu spent himself on our behalf, and came home night after night with a tale of constant rebuffs, but always with fresh plans and new hopes for the morrow.

Meanwhile, we wandered about among the excited crowds, and saw much and wondered more. The first day we had one or two narrow escapes from being mobbed as Prussians. That night M. Dellieu insisted on our buying a couple of disreputably ugly hats, of the style worn by the medical students of Paris, and thus disguised we had no further troubles.

Night after night we sat smoking into the small hours of the next day, relating our adventures, and discussing our chances with our genial host, who seemed to find much enjoyment in us, in spite of the trouble we were putting him to, which he insisted on calling a pleasure.

It was on the fourth night that he came in with somewhat tempered exuberance of delight.

"Enfin! My dear boys," he broke out, "I doubt if we shall do much better than this. I can get you taken on as stretcher-bearers attached to an ambulance which leaves tonight to join the Third Corps d'Armée, under Bazaine, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Metz. Metz is a base from which important operations will certainly take place. What say you? It is not what I could have wished for you, but it may offer chances."

We said "Yes!" with a shout of thanks. M. Dellieu hurried out to complete the arrangement, and we turned to and completed ours; and before midnight we had bid our friend in need good-bye, and were grinding slowly eastward towards Chalons.

This is not a history of the Franco-German War, but the story of Marie and George de Kerhuel, as I saw it and came in contact with it; and so I must pass rapidly over the time that intervened till we got back to Paris and to the strange happenings which there befell us.

We saw much, Hugh Myrtle and I, up there in Alsace; much more than we had expected to see; very much more than we would either of us wish to see again. We had gone for experience. We had our fill.

Our ambulance was ordered straightway to the front, to join the 9th division of Frossard's corps. For two days we lay in the neighbourhood of Saarbrücken, where the first skirmish of the war had just taken place, and the Prince Imperial had received that much derided "baptism of fire." Our camp was on the Spicheren hills, overlooking a lovely expanse of dale and wood and stream. On the third day a flood of spiked helmets came pouring through Saarbrücken, and welled up the neighbouring heights till all that side of the country was blue. From the wooded hills behind the big ironworks at Stiring we watched the great fight on the Spicheren; and when, bit by bit, the Prussians broke down the French resistance, and we saw them come swarming triumphantly up the mighty rock bastions of the Rote Berg, and far and wide over the hills we heard the French bugles wailing the retreat, and the uproar died away into sullen, desultory shots, Myrtle turned his intent dark face to me and said, "If they can take that, and in the face of such odds too, they can take anything. Our friends are going to have a devil of a time. Now let's go down and pick up the fragments."

Ah! The fragments! See one battlefield, still hot with blood, and groaning with its awful burden of broken men and horses, and the sights and sounds of it will remain with you to your dying day.

We stumbled down the hill in the darkness, and made for the fires which had begun to glimmer round the Rote Berg. The Prussian carriers were already at work, sifting grain from husks. A great number of ladies and women from the neighbouring villages were assisting in the good work. Our ambulance had vanished with the rest of the French army. Not a single French surgeon or bearer could we see.

"Are we going to change sides, old man?" asked Myrtle.

"No, we must stick to our own."

"Then we'd better go after it. Down that road, that's

the way our men went. Hang it!" he said, as the crash of musketry and the shouting broke out along the road we had to go. "They're beginning again."

"They're attacking the town there," I said; "we must go round."

So we stumbled across the railway line, and forded a stream, and got on to the open ground again, and gave the fighting a wide berth, and through the fields came at last to the high road. There was no question as to whether it was the right road. Every second step we came upon some token of hasty flight—knapsacks, chassepôts, ammunition and provision wagons; a gun with one whole horse and three broken ones, which had got thus far, and then dropped down to die. We unharnessed the survivor, and he whinnied gratefully at sight of us, and showed himself glad of our companionship, even though it entailed the carrying of a double load.

We had barely got started again, when a wild scurry of fugitives—the remnant of the defence of the town—caught us up, and whirled us along in its panting flight. They had no curiosity concerning us. They had only one thought among the lot of them, and that was to get on. They had no breath for speech, but they managed somehow to curse. If oaths could have struck sparks, our dark road would have been well lighted. Our horse went along at a heavy trot. They laid shaking hands on his harness, and loped alongside.

Then one fell and lay. The rest took no notice, but we could not leave him so. We drew rein and dismounted. The others loosed themselves from us with curses at our stoppage, and went on. It was *sauve qui peut*. We lifted the fallen man on to the horse, and slowly followed the retreating footsteps. Presently we came across another body. Him, too, we hoisted on to our steed, and followed still more slowly. There seemed no cavalry pursuit, and we had no fear of being interfered with if there had been. The red cross badges on our arms, we knew, would keep us safe from molestation.

One more wounded man we picked up, and went along then at a walk, Myrtle leading the horse, and I steadying our cargo as well as I could; and it was no easy job.

We tramped steadily on. Our wounded men groaned now and again, but we could do nothing for them in the dark. One of them I perceived, by the feel of the three stripes of gold cord on his cuff, was a captain; the others were privates.

We jogged on in this way for some three hours, and then halted for a rest at a stream which splashed down the bank and ran across the road. We gave the horse a drink and took one ourselves, and tried to get some into our unfortunates. The officer drank, and sat up somewhat dazedly, but thereafter was able to support himself on the horse.

We resumed our journey, and coming presently to a dividing of the ways halted again to decide which one to take. Both seemed equally trodden by our forerunners. We were still hesitating, when our officer spoke.

"Keep the higher road, Messieurs; that other leads to St. Avold. They will be there to-morrow. We must get to Metz."

So we turned into the higher road, and trudged along.

As soon as day broke we sought a farmhouse which stood back from the road, and unloaded our wounded and propped them up by the door. A terrified woman came out to our knocking, and presently gave us bread and milk, and a mouthful of hay for the horse, while three small, dark-eyed children peeped at us from behind her skirts.

"Is it true, Monsieur, that the Prussians are coming?" she asked tremulously.

"I'm afraid they will come," I said.

"We heard the troops passing all night," she said; "but it is incredible that we are beaten."

"It is a change of front, that is all," said our officer, who was sitting on the ground, with his back against the house, munching bread and sipping milk. And as he spoke I recognised him, limp and dishevelled and all out of curl as he was. It was M. Raoul de Querhoal. He must have

caught the spark of knowledge in my eye. He peered at me in the half light, but made no sign of recognition.

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu!" wailed the woman. "If those monsters are coming, we must go. And the little ones——! Oh, mon dieu! Mon dieu!"

"If you will take my advice, Madame," I said, "you will stop where you are. There will be no fighting round here, and the Prussians will not harm a hair of your head or the children's. They are fighting soldiers, not women and children."

"You believe it, Monsieur? Mon dieu! If I could think so."

"I assure you. Yesterday the ladies from Saarbrücken and all about were helping with the wounded on the field, and they had no fear of the Prussians. You will suffer infinitely more by going."

"Dieu merci, if Monsieur says so. You see, the children are very small; the suffering would be theirs."

We got some milk down the throats of our other wounded men, and. as the light improved. we set to work to examine the damages.

The captain had a bullet through the shoulder. He was much bruised, and had lost a good deal of blood. It was a clean wound, however, and got evidently at very short range. I said as much as I hastily bound him up.

"We were only two squadrons," he said, "and about as many of the Line. When we saw it was all up we charged, and I got hit, and my horse went down at the same moment. I doubt if another of my men escaped."

One of the others was shot through the chest. We could make but a cursory examination, but it seemed a marvel he could ever have got as far as he had done. We got a few drops of milk down his throat. He sat up suddenly and coughed violently; then the blood gushed from his mouth, and he fell forward—dead.

The other had the upper bone of the right arm shattered The arm would have to come off; but we had no instruments, and it had to wait. He was in great pain, but we

bound it to his chest, to keep it from joggling, and mounted him on the horse, with the captain's arm round him to keep him from falling, and set out again. The woman declined the few sous I offered her.

"But no," she said. "It is for the country. And you are quite sure it is safe to wait, Monsieur?"

"Quite sure," I said; and we bade her good-bye and left her.

It was late in the afternoon when we trailed, with the other stragglers in the rear of Bazaine's troops, through the eastern camp into Metz. At de Querhoal's request we sought out headquarters, and delivered him there. He thanked us politely for our assistance, but gave no sign of knowing me, and I was not sure whether he did so or not. I saw no more of him during my stay in Metz, and on inquiry learned that he had, after one night's rest, continued his journey towards Chalons or Paris. Then we took our other man to hospital, and, at last, with infinite difficulty, for there was much confusion and the place was overflowing with men, we found our own ambulance, and reported ourselves.

"Eh bien! You did something, then," said our surgeon-major; "but it was your duty to have kept with us."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say that in that case we should have done nothing more than the rest of them, but I forbore.

For seven days we had rest, and nothing to do but watch the troops and baggage trains pouring through the town towards the west. Most of the wounded had been left behind at Forbach, or on the roadsides on the way to Metz, and the hospitals had at present more assistants than patients.

Twice during those days of doubt and expectancy we saw the Emperor. The heavy face was careworn and drooping. The attempt at impassivity seemed to be maintained only by strong effort.

"He's badly hit, and if one can judge by the look of his face I should say he was a very sick man," was Myrtle's

comment; and, with an Englishman's weakness for the losing side, I could not but feel profoundly sorry for the man whose world—a rotten world no doubt, still all the world he had—was crumbling to pieces all round him.

Then, one lovely afternoon, we heard heavy firing to the east, out Colombey way. Frossard's division went to join the fray, and we were ordered to follow.

It was a great fight, and we had our hands full. It was quite dark before the fighting stopped, and our troops poured back behind the shelter of the forts. The Prussians drew off, too, and the field was clear for the pickers-up of the fragments. All that night and next day, until we were spent, we worked, sorting out and bringing in the shattered men, and found place for them where we could.

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu! Mon dieu!" murmured our chief, as he and his assistants progressed slowly along the line, cutting, sawing, probing, binding, without pause. "Are there any whole men left, then?"

It was in the evening of that same day, as he stood utterly worn out and panting against the wall for a moment's rest, with his shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbow, and his arms all spattered red, that Myrtle and I begged to be allowed to assist.

"Thanks, thanks!" he gasped; "but I cannot have my boys mauled. You are willing, but you do not know."

"Permit me, Monsieur le Major," I said; and turned to the next case, a big dragoon, with his left leg smashed to pieces below the knee. A moment's examination showed that the leg must come off at once.

"Chloroform, Myrtle." And I picked up the chief's own tools, and proceeded to fix on the tourniquet. I had that leg off in record time, and without a single slip, and we had ligatured the arteries and dressed the stump before the astounded surgeon dared to interfere for fear of spoiling the job. It was the first live leg I had ever tackled, but I had had plenty of practice with dead ones. But I was on my mettle, and I just pretended this was a dead one.

"Dieu-de-dieu!" he exclaimed. "You are boys of gold. Can he handle the tools also?"

"Better than I," I said.

"And you have been carrying a stretcher! Nom-de-dieu! What folly! You will stop by me in future."

So we got our grade, and we worked by Surgeon-Major Cannot's side till the time came for us to leave him.

Two days later came Mars-la-Tour, two days after that Gravelotte; and it seemed to us, as it had seemed to M. Cannot after Colombey, that there could not be many whole men left.

We saw nothing of the fighting. The sound of it, indeed, filled the air, and broken and very muddled accounts of it—chiefly bearing on their own deeds of prowess, and the inadequacy of their officers—were imparted to us by our patients; but every minute of our time, and every ounce of go that was in us, was taken up fighting away the grim spectre. For endless trains of wounded poured in from morning to night, and all night long, and never ceased coming.

"My God, Glyn! This is an experience!" said Myrtle, one time, as we met for a moment over a wash basin, and worked the blood out of our finger nails in company.

"We came for experience, my boy, and we're getting it."

"I'd like to have some of the men that brought all this about with their noses tied to that table for a couple of days," he said, jerking his head towards the operation-table, which an orderly was sluicing down with a big red sponge. "In fact, I wouldn't mind having some of them right on it; it would bring matters home to them. It's all very well to set the ball rolling, and then ride away in a carriage, with a face like the devil——"

"I doubt if he could suffer much more, Hugh, even if your knife was as blunt as mine is."

A few days previously we had seen the Emperor drive gloomily away amid scowling faces and muttered curses—his own scapegoat. And again, and in spite of all, as I watched him, I felt profound pity for the broken man.

For a month we lived and breathed wounded men. They died on our hands in shoals, in spite of all our care and attention, for the supply of necessaries in every shape and form

was utterly inadequate to the demands upon them, and our patients had perforce to go short of very many things which would have made for recovery. Our chief raged and raved, and worked like a very Hercules, but he could not evolve the things we lacked from his inner consciousness, and the military authorities seemed to regard every man who could not bear arms against the foe as a useless pawn, out of the game and done with.

Then the wet weather came, and we were flooded with sodden unfortunates from the lower camps, and gastric fever and typhus ran riot among us. Pyæmia also broke out in our wards, and our men went out like snuffed candles.

The news of the disaster at Sedan reached us from Thionville, but no one believed it, it was too appalling.

It was confirmed, and Metz lost heart. Still, Bazaine tried again and again to break through the German cordon; but he only packed our already tight-packed hospitals the tighter. It was terribly depressing work; the whole place stank like a pestilence. The recollection of the provisioning gives me an uncomfortable feeling inside even yet; but at the time our thoughts were entirely for our sick, who died in heaps from simple lack of the things that would have kept them alive. We hated the idea of leaving our work, ghastly as it was; and yet—and yet—we had done more than enough. The Marshal seemed to have succumbed to the prevalent depression: the days and weeks passed, and no more attempts were made to break through; it looked as though his mind was made up to wait quietly for the bitter inevitable. Our wounded decreased, but the sick increased incredibly. The tending of them was a matter of routine; our special work seemed over. We had done our very best for our friends inside the doomed city; our friends outside demanded our consideration as well. For over two months I had had no word from Marie or my mother. I had written many times, but could not be sure that my letters ever reached their destinations. The feeling of discomfort grew upon me; grew so great at last that I broached the subject to Myrtle.

"I was only hanging on for you to say the word, my boy," he said, with a sigh of relief. "I'm ready to quit as soon as you like. How are we going to get out?"

"We'll talk it over with old Cannot; I wouldn't like him to feel as if we were leaving him in the lurch."

So we broached the matter, in confidence, to our chief that very night; and at first he threw up his hands in despair.

"But, my boys, however can I get on without you? You are as two additional right hands to me," he said. "These others——" with a shrug, and then a quick, "No, no, they are all good, and they do their best; but with you I feel quite safe that nothing will be neglected."

"It is good of you to say so, M. Cannot, and we have done our best; but now we are beginning to feel anxious about our own friends outside. The defence has broken down, the country we fear will be overrun. I have a mother in Brittany, and my fiancée also, and I have heard no word of them for two months."

"Is Ma'm'selle Française?" he asked with interest.

"Yes; of La Bretagne."

"It is but natural you should wish to go," he said, nodding kindly, but full of thought. "Yes, truly, it is natural. But, yes, you must go. Now, how?"

That was a difficult question, but I had an idea, and I got it from seeing a man drop a couple of corked bottles into the river one night when I had gone out for a breath of fresh air. The bottle contained dispatches for Thionville, and the sender cast them on the waters in hopes of their some time getting there. It seemed to me that we might get out the same way. It would be a cold and risky swim, and no doubt the river was well watched; but it seemed to me the only way out till the Prussians came in, and that we were not inclined to wait for.

M. Cannot shivered at the notion, but acknowledged that, at all events, our dead bodies might float through the Prussian lines. We discussed the matter in all its bearings, and could hit upon no better plan.

"When will you go?" asked M. Cannot.

"To-morrow night, if you can give us our dismissal by then."

"I will give you each a letter, stating what you have done for us here," he said; "it might come in useful. You have had neither adequate pay nor proper thanks, and you will never get either; but, my dear boys, some of us will never forget, and many that are gone will thank you." And the good old fellow's eyes were full of tears at thought of parting with us. "Speak to no one of your plans," he said; "the authorities would stop you. And when you get outside, if you do get through alive, take my advice, and say nothing to anybody. Will you take a letter for my wife, and deliver it if it is possible?"

This we gladly undertook, and set about our preparations like a couple of schoolboys the night before breaking-up day.

At nine o'clock the next night, in company with the Surgeon-Major, we passed out through the enceinte towards Fort St. Julien, nominally to see some patients there. Before reaching the fort we turned off the road and struck down to the river, and there, in the dark, hastily completed our toilets with M. Cannot's assistance.

We entered the water dressed only in dark woollen vests and pants. Every particle of white skin that showed—faces, necks, arms, and feet—was rubbed over with a brown stain which would stand the water and took time to wear off. Our clothes and shoes and a flask of cognac, made up in tight bundles in black oiled paper, were bound to our heads, and another small medicine bottle of cognac hung round each of our necks by a string for refreshment *en route*.

We wrung M. Cannot's hand in silence. He kissed us each on our brown cheeks, and we were off.

The night wind had been cold. The water was colder, and it did not smell over sweet; but our hearts were warm with hope, and we pushed on ahead of the current.

In less than half-an-hour we passed the French outposts. So far, good. We drank to our own good health and safe

delivery, kept well in the centre of the stream, and drove on.

We were cold to the marrow before we heard the calls of the Prussian sentinels on the banks above Chieulles. We held our breath and floated past; on again past Malroy, through the bridge of boats at Argancy, and then we could hold out no longer. We crawled ashore, stiff and sodden, and rubbed and slapped one another into circulation again, nibbled a biscuit, took in more cognac, dressed ourselves decently, and scrambled up into the road leading to Thionville. But we had no intention of calling there. At best it would mean delay. It might mean a good deal more than delay, and we had no time to waste picking out kinks in red tape. We gave it wide circuit, fed and rested at lonely farmhouses, journeyed by night, and forty-eight hours after leaving Metz we crossed the Luxemburg frontier, and our troubles, for the time being, were ended.

We two were the very last who brought bodies and souls out of Metz—except, indeed, that extremely strange individual M. Regnier, and General Bourbaki, whom he fooled into accompanying him on a fool's errand—until they all came out together that gloomy day six weeks later, all that was left of them. And the conquerors, marching in amid the slime, and filth, and the rotting horses, and the unburied dead, found our old friend Surgeon-Major Cannot still wrathfully fighting typhus and pyæmia; and they very soon put him into better fighting trim than he had been in since the siege began.

I believe a certain Scotchman—in fact, *the Scotsman*—claims to have been the last man to get out; but he left ten days before we did. But then it was his business to talk about it, and it was not ours.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE FROM THE DEAD.

In spite of my desire to get on, and learn how matters had been going at home during our exile, we found it necessary to take a couple of days' rest in Luxemburg.

The quiet, after the turmoil and confusion of beleaguered Metz, the freedom from strain, and plenty of good food, soon pulled us round; and on the third day we started for Namur, and came thence, without difficulty, down through Douai, Arras, and Amiens to Rouen. If I could have been certain that the steamers were still running from Southampton to St. Malo, I would have gone straight across to England; but in Belgium I could get no information on the subject. Myrtle elected to go with me. Our friendship had become very close knit in the trying times through which we had come together.

From Rouen we journeyed down the river to Honfleur, and so by diligence to Caen, Coutances, Avranches, Dol, and Dinan; and walked in on my mother one late September afternoon, just in time for a cup of tea, and were received by her with a gasp of thankful delight.

My first inquiries were for Marie.

"She went to Paris ten days ago to nurse George," said my mother.

"To Paris! Alone!"

"No; the old servant Henriette Dobain went with her."

"And why not Madame or Godefroi!"

"Anna is not strong, she has never fully got over the shock of Jean's death; and Godefroi is needed here. He and old Joseph Dobain do most of the work about the mill. All the younger men have gone off, or been carried off, to the war—the horrible war! It is making much distress even here. There is not a family but has someone either killed or wounded or prisoner. Will it last much longer, Charles!"

"The Frenchmen could stop it to-day, if they would acknowledge what all the rest of the world sees—that they are beaten. But they won't, and so it will probably go on in some kind of a way. Has Madame heard from Marie, do you know, Mother?"

"I saw her two days ago, and she had not heard up to then. I suppose everything is upset."

I felt decidedly uncomfortable. Paris, I knew, was by this time shut in by the Prussians more or less completely. If they proceeded to a bombardment, which I did not think likely, Paris would be an uncomfortable place to be in; and Marie was there shut up inside with the rest.

"I shall go over and see Madame at once," I said, "and learn if she has any news. If none, I must go to Paris, Mother."

"If you judge it necessary, my boy, you must go."

"Are you game, Myrtle, or will you wait here?"

"I'll knock your head off, if you suggest it in earnest," he replied.

He wanted to come with me to Kerhuel, but I preferred going alone.

It was nearly dark when I arrived there, and Madame was as delighted to see me as my own dear mother had been.

She and Godefroi were just sitting down to dinner, and I joined them.

"Have you any word from Marie, Madame?" I asked.

"Not a line, Charles. I am getting anxious for news of her. I know everything is upside down, but I expected some word from her."

"I shall go there at once."

"Can you get in?" asked Godefroi; "I hear the Prussians are all round, and will let no one in or out."

"I'll get in somehow." And I told them how we got out of Metz. "Now, where shall I find Marie when I get there? What address was she going to, dear Madame?"

"I have the telegram here." And she produced it from her pocket, much crumpled, and evidently much read, though there was not much to read. It ran:

"Can Marie come to nurse me? Wounded in arm and leg.—George, chez Taillou, Rue Duvernois, 23." It was dated September 15th, ten days ago.

"She went the next day," said Madame, "and Henriette with her."

"They might have difficulty in getting in even then," I said. "But no doubt the Western Railway would be the last to close up. May I keep this telegram, Madame, with the address on it? It is just possible it might assist me in getting through the lines."

"Then take it," she said. And I saw that she had clung to it with that curious disinclination to part with even the slenderest filament of connection with her dear ones which I had seen in my own mother, and which, I presume, is inwrought in the mother nature.

I was still talking over some of our experiences in Metz, when old Joseph Dobain, Godefroi's right-hand man in the mill, came to the door and said:

"Tiens! M. Godefroi, what do you make of this out here?"

"What is it, Joseph?" And Godefroi got up and went out into the passage to the back door.

"Charles!" he called; and I went out to him. They were both standing looking out over the river. The sky beyond the Querhoal woods was pulsing red.

"A fire!" I said. "Where is it?"

"It must be the château," said Godefroi. "We'd better go and help."

"Yes, go," said Madame, who had joined us. "They are no doubt as short-handed as we are." And we three set off across the weir, with no faintest idea of what that fire meant to us and to the sad-faced lady we left standing on the step quietly looking at it.

We crossed the weir, and sped across the wooded ground at Joseph's speed, and the roar and crackle of the flames grew upon us through the tree trunks as we drew near. We got into the great alley leading up to the house, and saw that the whole of one end was blazing furiously, and the flames

were licking swiftly towards the centre. Dark figures were passing to and fro, and standing in clumps silhouetted against the fiery background. We approached one such group, blue blouses with grizzled faces, all old men, all with their hands in their pockets.

"It burns!" said one, with a grim, nervous laugh, looking round at us.

"What started it?" asked Godefroi.

The old men looked at one another, and one said:

"God knows. Maybe the devil came for the old man, and set it on fire."

"Is there no water? Can we do nothing?" I asked.

"No water but the well and the river, and nothing to carry it in," said the old man. "It was meant to burn, or it wouldn't have got on fire."

"Where is M. le Comte?" asked Godefroi.

"We have not seen him, M'sieur, but we have seen the devil. Without doubt he came for M. le Comte, and has taken him away with him."

"Oh, tcha!" said Godefroi angrily. "Don't be such fools. Is there no one belonging to the château about?"

"The old Jean-Marie is over there; but all the same, M'sieur, we saw the devil. Is it not so, mes gars?" he appealed to the others.

"But yes."

"It is true."

"We saw him without doubt, M'sieur."

"It is the end such as we have always expected."

But, apart from their stupidity, there was evidently nothing to be done. The château, solid as it looked, was like a tinder-box inside. The centuries-old beams and panelling burnt with a furious, clear flame. A London fire brigade could have made little headway against it.

It was against human nature, however, to stand hand in pocket gazing with open mouths and tremulous chins like these old clods. There might be something to be saved.

Godefroi hurried up to old Jean-Marie and asked peremptorily, "Where is your master, Jean-Marie?"

"Dieu, then! I know not; but he is not here. They say the devil has taken him," said the old fellow sulkily.

"Is he in the château?"

"Like enough; I have not seen him. That is his part there that is burnt. He and the devil lived there together. As for me, thank God, I lived in the stables. For twenty years I have not set foot in the house. Oh, there were reasons; ma foi, yes, reasons, good reasons, without doubt."

"Was there anyone else there? Any servants?"

"There was the old Félicité, Madame la Comtesse en effet. She is over there in the bushes. She is mad, like the rest."

"No one else in the house?"

"Not a soul, M'sieur, except the devil, and they do say he got out."

We went round to the other wing, towards which the white tongues of flame were licking their way with swift, venomous thirst. The blue blouses shuffled after us with spasmodic ebullitions of country wit which evoked dry cackles of laughter.

Godefroi and I clambered over the railing of a low balcony, and swung back the green jalousies, but there was a wooden shutter inside the glass, and we could see nothing.

"A stone, Joseph!" called Godefroi over his shoulder; and Joseph handed up a huge lump of rock. Godefroi dashed it at the glass; and Jean-Marie in the rear said, "Ta-ta! The old man will send you in a bill for that, Monsieur." Another bang with the stone and the shutter flew open. Godefroi put his hand through the broken window, and turned the handle. It opened inwards, and we stepped into the room. I struck a match. We got a glimmer of pictures on the walls—old family portraits they seemed to be. The furniture was swathed in linen garments.

"We may as well save what we can," said Godefroi; and seized a picture and carried it to the window, and dropped it into Joseph's arms. I did the same. I heard him calling to the blue blouses to come and help to carry them "away out there, you silly old idiots; not where the walls will fall on them."

We made a clearance of that room, all except the heavier furniture, which we had not time to move. We opened the door into the hall, and the glare and roar of the fire greeted us half-way down it. There was in it a curious, dogged, single-aimed attention to the business in hand which reminded me, somehow, of the onslaught of the Prussian troops on the Spicheren heights. It came on with a roar of silent concentration—which is an anomaly, and expresses it exactly—seized point after point with grim determination, and passed on to the next one, as though simply working out its appointed end, and doing what had been given it to do from the beginning of time. There was no fancy frilling, no turning aside, no waste of any kind. The Spicheren heights had to be taken, no matter what the cost. That château had to be burned out in the shortest possible time. So the flames came snaking and leaping along the hall, and we entered room after room, and flung out of window everything we could lift.

By midnight the roof had fallen in, and only the walls were left standing. Through the vacant eyes of the house the ruins glowed like a furnace. Fagged and grimy, we straggled home across the weir, supporting between us the old housekeeper Félicité, who had sat in the bushes all night watching the fire, and never opened her lips.

Madame took the poor old creature to the kitchen. She seemed completely dazed—if, indeed, that was not her natural state, as Jean-Marie had stated—and Godefroi and I and Joseph sat down to a hastily prepared meal, of which we stood in much need; and, presently, when she had bestowed her waif, Madame came and sat with us, and heard all we had to tell.

We were busily discussing the fire and the food, and washing the smoke and dust out of our throats with big draughts of amber cyder, when there came a knock on the front door, and old Joseph started up to answer it.

We heard his startled exclamation, and next moment he tumbled back into the room crying, "Mon dieu! mon dieu! The devil!" And behind him in the doorway, leaning one

shoulder heavily against the side post, and swaying slightly, and looking in on us with wild, bewildered eyes, stood a man.

Was it a man? Or was it, as Joseph had said, the devil? A gaunt, awful spectre, with wild tangles of grey hair bristling over head and face and shoulders, and out through the open front of his tattered shirt; sunken cheeks, and caverns under bushed penthouses of brows, and, in the caverns, eyes that made my back creep.

I had seen him once before. Once seen he could never be forgotten. His face and hair were clotted with dried blood, as though Raoul de Querhoal had just left off beating him over the head with his gun barrel, as I had seen him doing that last time.

We had all sprung up at sight of him; but he looked at none of us, but at Madame only. On her the deep eyes were fixed hypnotically. The wild glare was fading out of them; life and recollection were struggling back to them.

"Nana?" he said, in a hoarse, wondering whisper; and raised his awful nailed hands towards her. But it was not the same whimpering bleat of "Na-na!" that I had heard in the wood.

Madame's face was like the gray wood ashes on the hearth. She gazed back stupefied. She glided forward like one walking in her sleep. Then she shrieked, "Godefroi! Godefroi!" And, as Godefroi sprang to her side, saying, "I am here, ma mère," she fell senseless into his arms, and he laid her gently on the chair which I swung forward to receive her.

He sprang up and faced the intruder.

"Get out!" he cried angrily. "Get out! Keep back!" For the man was coming in.

But I stopped him.

"Gently, Godefroi! There is more in this than we know. Your mother knows him."

"Impossible!" he said. "Knows—that?"

The scarecrow had drawn back at Godefroi's menace, and he stood now, leaning against the door-post, looking at us as before. Then one hand rose to his forehead, and he gripped

it like one suffering from a headache or a troublesome problem. The long talon nails drew blood under the pressure.

I wetted Madame's lips with cognac, and bathed her forehead with a serviette dipped in cyder, since there was no water. As soon as her eyes opened they fixed in a wild stare, as though drawn by a magnet, on the eyes of the man at the door.

"It is not possible!" I heard her murmur. "Mon dieu! Mon dieu! It is not possible!"

And yet something within her, something keener than the flesh, told her that it was so. She struggled up in the chair, and sat gripping the arms till her fingers were like ivory.

So, for a minute, while we all stood wondering. Then she got up, and once more glided swiftly to the door—to the man.

With her left hand arched over that side of her face, as though to hide her emotion from us, she peered into the wild, sunken eyes; and something looked out of them at her, and she knew.

The wild man looked at her with knowledge also, and murmured once more, "Nana!"

Her self control now was very wonderful. She raised the other white hand, and it was trembling as with an ague, and very gently she put aside the masses of tangled hair.

"My God! My God! Is it indeed thou?" she murmured. "Godefroi!" The last with an intonation quite different from her usual one when using that name.

Godefroi, thinking he was called, hastened to her.

"What is it, ma mère?"

"It is your father," she said softly; and drew the wild man gently into the room.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

ANXIETY or no anxiety on my mother's part, there was no going home for me that night. This thing beyond belief claimed me wholly; and, indeed, with all modesty, I do not know what they would have done without me. For Godefroi was, for a considerable time after that astounding revelation, in a state of incredulous amazement which quite bereft him of speech and almost of action.

It was I who had to feed the new comer, cutting meat and bread into small pieces, and tendering them bit by bit with very small sips of wine in between; while Madame sat in her chair, tremulous, watchful, wondering, much as Mary must have sat and looked at Lazarus while Martha ministered to him.

By the time that strange meal was ended with a small cup of hot coffee, just dashed with cognac, Godefroi the younger had partially come to himself, though it was evident he thought us all gone crazy, himself included, for crediting so strange a notion for a moment.

Our guest meanwhile was perfectly quiet, even subdued. He accepted all we gave him, and the food did him good. He sat looking at the fire across the table, occasionally glancing at objects on either side of it. Whenever his eyes fell on Madame they rested there, and he stopped eating. When she perceived this she quietly moved her chair out of range of his sight, and he did not look round at her.

What puzzled me most—for I had really not yet had time to think of possible causes, so intent had I been on ministering to the pitiful result—was the fact that he seemed as much surprised at finding himself there as we were to have him. He would stop in his feeding, and seem to ponder the matter painfully, then give it up and go on eating.

Before his slow meal was finished, I begged Madame to

get me hot water ready in the kitchen, and scissors, and other necessaries; and she hurried away, grateful for the occupation. When I judged he had had enough to eat for the time being, I called to Godefroi, "You must come and help me, Godefroi. I can't manage all alone."

He had been pacing the end of the room in great agitation; stopping now and again to look at us from under his knitted brow. I could not blame his incredulity, it seemed altogether too monstrous to be true; but I had faith in Madame's perception.

"Yes, I will help," said Godefroi; "but, God in heaven! I cannot believe it is true."

"Wait!" I said. "There is some terrible story behind it all."

"But he is buried over there at Dinan," he said.

I shook my head. "You have all thought so, but Madame knows better now. Take that other arm, and we will lead him into the kitchen."

He made no resistance, but hung heavily on us, as though suddenly weakened under the strain of unusual emotion.

Godefroi and I locked ourselves in with him, and set to work. And a horrible task it was, though his condition was only somewhat in degree worse than that of many a man who had come under my hands after three weeks in the trenches round Metz. Godefroi went white and sick over the job; but, then, he had not seen the things I had seen out there. And here, at all events, we had not a shattered body and the grinding agony of broken bones to contend with. The damage was mental and internal, and of long standing. There was a cut on the head, deep and painful no doubt, but it was not serious. We cleansed him as well as we could, and pared down into the semblance of human fingers those awful talons, which made my back creep whenever they scraped on anything. We cut off all his tangled hair, which the fire had already shortened, till it was no more than a regulation bristle. We trimmed the wild growths on his face down to something approaching an Imperial moustache

and goatee, such as I had seen in an old photograph of M. de Kerhuel. These changes made a striking improvement in his appearance. The wild man of the woods lay on the floor and in the wash-tub; and in his stead there slowly emerged, under our hands, a gaunt, hollow-eyed reminiscence of the past, which stirred Godefroi's soul, and drew startled exclamations from his lips. The eyes of a loving woman can see through disguisements against which the eyes of a man are blind.

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu! Mon dieu!" gasped Godefroi, as he stood off to view our handiwork. "It is he, without doubt. What, in heaven's name, is the meaning of it all, Charles?"

"That we shall try and find out," I said.

Then I dressed the wounded head, and in doing so lighted, as I believed, on the original and immediate cause of all his trouble—an indentation of the skull, which must have been made very many years ago. He was badly scorched, especially about the legs and feet, and I covered them with flour for the time being.

When at last we led him upstairs, and got him safely stowed in bed, he fell asleep almost instantly, and Godefroi went down to bring up Madame.

She came quietly in, and raised her hands in silent amazement at his changed appearance. Then she fell silently on her knees by the bedside, and there we left her.

It was with very mingled feelings that I drove back to Dinan with Joseph, in his green-tilted spring cart, in the fresh of the morning. I was full of anxiety on Marie's account, and I wanted to start for Paris without a moment's delay. On the other hand, this new patient, and the extraordinary circumstances under which he had come to us, demanded full and immediate attention and investigation. Joseph was full of curiosity and speculation, and talked without ceasing; but I could give him no enlightenment, and I was so tired that it needed little pretence to make him think I was asleep, and his endless babblements rippled over my head without eliciting any response.

It was still early when I reached home, and went up to my mother's room, and startled her almost out of her senses by my strange news.

"Mother," I said, "Monsieur de Kerhuel has come back."

"Godefroi? Why, where has he been?"

"Not Godefroi, but Godefroi's father, Madame's husband, Marie's father."

"Good gracious, boy, what are you talking about?" And she sat up suddenly, under the impression that my brain had given way with what I had gone through in Metz.

I told her all about it, and she grew wildly excited, and was for rushing off to Kerhuel then and there, to render any help that was possible to her friend. But I persuaded her that Madame would want the recovered man to herself for at least a day; and, moreover, I had it vaguely in my mind that Myrtle and I, between us, might do something more for that wounded head which had been much in my thoughts. That there had existed for many years a pressure on the brain, as the result of that former damage, which the later blow had somehow partially relieved, I felt sure. It was quite possible that the pressure might be still further relieved, with the result of a still greater accession, possibly a full recovery, of brain power.

Having persuaded my mother that she could do nothing for Madame at the moment, and explained my views as to the possible great results of an operation, I went in to Myrtle, and, sitting on his bed, gave him a full account of the night's happenings.

"What an extraordinary country to live in," was his surprised comment. "Have you any idea, yourself, what it all means, Glyn?"

"I've got a vague notion that there's a black story behind it all. If you'll get up and dress, we'll have some coffee, and go and discuss it with a friend here who knows more about things than I do. Could we manage that operation between us?"

"It's delicate work, but I'm game to try."

When we had had a drink of coffee, we set out to find M. Renel. He was at home, and delighted to see us back safe and sound from the wars. Then, shut up in his little study, I told him what had happened at Querhoal and at Kerhuel during the night.

When I had done, and his amazement had subsided somewhat, he fixed upon me a look of keen inquiry and grave anxiety, and I knew what he was going to ask.

"It cannot possibly be the same man you saw——"

"Yes, he is the man I saw in the wood that day."

"Mon dieu! Then M. le Curé knows the whole matter."

"I want you to come with us to him at once."

"He is not here; he is in Paris, I believe. He went away about a fortnight ago, it was said for Paris."

"That is a misfortune. I am going to Paris; perhaps I may come across him. If I do, I will get the truth out of him somehow, if I have to hammer it out."

"M. Raoul must know also."

"Yes; I may meet him also. We saved his life at Forbach. Now, broadly, what do you make of it all, M. Renel?"

"There is undoubtedly some terrible story behind. M. de Kerhuel was supposed to be drowned seventeen years ago; a body, wearing certain articles which seemed to identify it as his, was found at St. Malo, and buried as his body. Apparently he has been held in confinement at Querhoal, and has been more or less out of his mind. The Count, you say, is dead. M. le Curé and Raoul are in the story. What about the old Félicité you recovered from the fire? She may know something."

"I forgot all about her; but I doubt if she'll speak. How long has she been at the château?"

"Many years; but I could not say how many. It is, as you say, quite likely she will not say anything. She is of M. le Curé's flock."

"We think it possible, M. Renel, that M. de Kerhuel's condition may be still further improved by an operation on the brain, if Madame will permit the attempt; and the

sooner that is done the better, for I must get away to Paris. There is no news from Marie since she left home, and I am very anxious on her account."

"Naturally," said M. Renel, "but I trust you will find her all right. When will you attempt the operation?"

"At once, for I want to get away. Myrtle, will you do me the very great favour of stopping behind to look after M. de Kerhuel?"

"I'll do anything to help, my boy; but I would very much like to be with you in Paris. If he goes on all right, I might join you later."

"But can you get in?" asked M. Renel. "The Prussians are said to be all round the city."

"Oh, we'll get in all right, somehow or other." And we told him how we had got out of Metz.

"What about tools?" said Myrtle. "Have you any, Glyn? And we'll need chloroform."

"I've thought of that. Is Dr. Daly still here, M. Renel?"

"He is still here."

"Then we will go at once, and beg his assistance. He is almost certain to have all we want, though he does not practise now. His advice will be useful, even if he won't perform the operation."

We all three went along to Dr. Daly's house in the Rue de l'Horloge.

"Ah, me boy!" said the old gentleman, with brisk welcome; and "Good morning, Padre!" to M. Renel. "I heard ye were back, and I thought ye'd be dropping in to tell the old fossil all about it. So ye were in Metz, and ye came through alive? And who's your friend?"

I introduced Myrtle, and gave the old doctor a very brief outline of our adventures, promising fuller details later on.

"Will you perform an operation on the brain for us, Doctor?" I asked.

"Which of ye's needing it?" And he looked quizzically from one to the other. "Or is it the good M. Renel who desires more light?"

"We've got a sick man up at Kerhuel. He's suffering from a wound in the head; but there's damage of very old standing, which the new wound has partially relieved. We want to complete the cure, and we want you to help us."

"Ay?" said the old man; and held out his withered old hand, and looked at it as if it belonged to someone else, and then shook his head. "I'll help ye with me brain and me tongue," he said, "but me hand's past work of that kind. But ye can do it all right; your hands should be in good practise. Have ye never done it?"

"Never on a live man. We had some cases in Metz from shell splinters, but the chief tackled them himself."

"Ay, well! There's no trouble if your hand's steady. When'll we go?"

"Now, if you can. Have you got chloroform, Doctor, and instruments? We have nothing."

"Ay, ay, I've got 'em all; though it's long since I touched any of 'em. We'll need a carriage, Charlie; Kerhuel's beyond the reach of my old legs, though many's the time I was there in the fore times."

I ran to the hotel and ordered a carriage, and when my mother heard we were going she insisted on going too.

"I shall stop there," she said. "Anna will need my help in the nursing, especially if you are going to operate on him."

"Sure, now, this is an unexpected treat, Mrs. Glyn," said the doctor, when he came out to the carriage. "The boys forgot to tell me ye were coming."

"The boys didn't know, Doctor; but I think Anna will be glad of my help in the nursing."

"Sure it'd make a sick man well, just to look at ye," was the old gallant's reply.

"And who's the sick man, Charlie?" he asked, as we rolled along. "Did ye bring him with ye?"

I told him the whole story, and he listened with keen attention and growing surprise.

"Saints and angels!" he burst out. "Godefroi de Kerhuel not dead! Not dead, and come back home; and me

at his burying twenty years ago! Is there no mistake, Charlie?"

"If there is, Doctor, it is Madame's mistake, and that's not likely. She knew him under all the dirt and tangle. He looks a very different man now from what he was when I first saw him."

"And from what he was when I first saw him, I'll be bound; but I'd trust a woman's heart. Her head's, maybe, not as good as ours——"

"I don't admit it," said my mother.

"But her heart hits the bull's eye every time."

"It sounds nasty, Doctor, but I have no doubt you mean well."

"It passes belief," he said, in much excitement. "And what the—well, anyway, what's the meaning of it all? Where's he been all this time?"

But that was too dark a mystery for common discussion. My own vague ideas were full of such grave prejudice to others that I preferred keeping silence till I felt surer of the ground.

And so all I said in reply to the doctor's question was, "Perhaps we shall learn that from our patient."

CHAPTER XVI.

LIGHT! LIGHT! MORE LIGHT!

We passed a commissary of police, attended by a very magnificent gendarme, striding along towards Querhoal—on the way to inquire into the fire, no doubt; and I felt pretty sure they would find their way to Kerhuel in due course.

Madame welcomed us with pale nervousness, but was undoubtedly glad to see us.

"My dear," said my mother, "I have come to help. I am a capital nurse." And Madame found relief on her neck.

I begged five minutes' conversation with her, and explained my ideas fully. She seemed startled at first, but followed all I said with keen interest, and then thanked us warmly for our kindness, and asked us to do just what we thought best.

We three of the profession went up at once to the room where M. de Kerhuel lay still sleeping. Godefroi was sitting by the bed. To him, also, I explained what we had come for, and he approved fully. We sent him out of the room, and stood round the sick man. Dr. Daly gazed long at the worn face before he said:

"He has suffered much. He is terribly changed, but I can see the remains of my old friend there. God help us! There is something very strange behind all this."

Then he bent over the sleeping man, and gently opened his nightshirt, and laid his ear to his chest. The sleeper moved, and murmured "Nana!"

"Can he stand it?" I asked.

"Yes, his heart is sound enough, though he's terribly wasted. Been half starved, I should say."

The doctor produced his bottle of chloroform and case of instruments, and Myrtle's eyes sparkled at sight of them.

"You like them?" said the old man.

"They're beauties."

"They've done good work in their time." And the old fingers travelled in loving reminiscence over the ivory handles.

"Which of you is deftest?"

"Myrtle is the better man," I said.

"Show me your hands." And he held our right hands in his for a moment.

"Yes," he said, dropping my hand, and holding Myrtle's long flexible fingers in his own. "With nerve and knowledge and that hand you can do great things. You shall do it."

I got all the other things he needed—water, sponge, bandages—and we gathered round the bed. The sick man had turned his head on the pillow. The old doctor gently slipped off the bandages I had put on the previous night, and bent and examined the wound with very great care. I pointed out the deep mark of the old wound.

"Yes," he said; "you are quite right. There is almost certainly pressure there. This last cut has begun our work and relieved it slightly."

He bent again, and examined the later wound, with a twist in his lip and a pinching of the brows. He straightened up and looked at me, and then bent down once more and examined it carefully again.

"Do you know what made that hole?" he said shortly.

"No, Doctor; I haven't got as far as that."

"Well, I can tell you almost to a certainty. It was made with the same weapon that made the old one. When we uncover the old wound we shall find exactly the same cleavage, unless I am very much mistaken; and, what's more, I can tell you the kind of weapon it was made with. It was the small-pointed tomahawk of the Paorongs. That wound was made up at Querhoal," he said quickly, and looking at me very intently, "or, at all events, with a weapon that came from there. I never saw but one of them, and that was brought home by Raoul de Querhoal, when he came back from his travels the first time—— Not the present Raoul; his father. What does it all mean?"

"We'll try and find that out, Doctor," I said. "Shall we get this job done first?"

He showed Myrtle exactly what to do, and how to do it; and Myrtle was the coolest of the lot of us. Then we administered the chloroform, and presently there came five tense minutes, during which we hung breathlessly over the bed, while the delicate knives cut inflexibly here and there, and probed and picked out chips of blood-stained bone; and it was done. And we all straightened up with a sigh of relief, and with much perplexity in our eyes, for we had seen exactly what Dr. Daly had foretold.

I left them bandaging the patient, and went down at once to tell Madame that the operation, at all events, had been successfully performed, and that we had every reason to hope for good results.

I found the two ladies sitting hand in hand, in the small room at the back, in silent expectation. M. Renel and Godefroi were together outside, talking earnestly.

"Thank God!" said Madame fervently, and began to weep quietly. "You are all very, very good to me. What should I have done without you, my dear boy?"

Presently the old doctor came down, and told Madame she might go up for two minutes, but it would be some time yet before the effects of the chloroform wore off.

"And, dear Madame, you will permit me to hint at breakfast. As an old practitioner I have a constitutional objection to empty stomachs. The machine must be fed."

But Madame's hospitable soul had forestalled his wants, and breakfast was waiting for us in the other room.

Myrtle assumed a proprietary interest in his patient, and insisted on waiting by him till he came round. So we left him with instructions to thump on the floor if he wanted anything. The ladies came soberly down again, and M. Renel and Godefroi came in from the garden, and the long room held a larger party than it had seen for many a day. But I thought sadly of the many merry parties I had seen round that table, which could never meet there again.

We had not quite finished breakfast, which the good old doctor was enjoying immensely—he was just saying that if

it were possible he would like to breakfast at Kerhuel every morning of his life—when there came a gentle knock on the floor above, and Madame started up with a look of apprehension.

"It is all right, dear Madame," said the doctor. "Our patient is coming to himself. Go and see, Charlie."

I sped up the stairs and down again.

"Yes, he is coming to. Will you come, Madame?" And she was at my heels.

At the sound of her dress on the polished floor the sick man's eyes turned on her, and, devoutly thankful, I saw in them a new dreamy knowledge and a great bewilderment. He looked at her steadfastly as she crossed the room, and murmured:

"Is it thou, Anna? It was the fog, ma chère. How did I get here?"

She sat down in the chair, from which Myrtle had risen, and took her husband's hand in both her trembling ones, and Hugh and I slipped quietly out of the room and closed the door.

"All well?" asked the doctor.

"All well," said Myrtle. And we loaded him with compliments, and everything his appetite demanded and the table afforded.

"Now," said the doctor, as he emptied his cognac into his coffee and lit a cigarette, "let us talk while Madame is away. I want to get to the bottom of this matter. M. Godefroi, what do you know of it?"

"I only know that he came to the door last night, the most frightful object conceivable, and that in spite of that my mother knew him."

"M. Renel?" asked the doctor.

"I do not think, M. le Docteur, that I know any more than you do yourself."

"Not so much," said the doctor smiling.

"That is very possible; but I mean concerning what happened at the time of M. de Kerhuel's supposed death nearly twenty years ago."

"Briefly, that is——?"

"Briefly, M. de Kerhuel, accompanied by his servant. Jean Dobain, a younger brother of old Joseph's, was supposed to have driven into the river in a fog; and a body, supposed to be M. de Kerhuel's, on account of the things found upon it, was found in St. Malo bay a week later, and buried as M. de Kerhuel."

"Exactly! It is the body of Jean Dobain that is buried at Dinan," said the doctor. "For some reason, Jean Dobain's body was made to take the place of M. de Kerhuel. Have you any idea, M. le Pasteur, who could possibly be interested in making such an exchange?"

"Mon dieu! No, I have not!" said M. Renel, in scared astonishment. Then he looked at me.

"Ah, Charles, and what do you know?" said the doctor, following his look.

I related my meeting with the wild man in the park at Querhoal, and when I mentioned Raoul and M. le Curé,

"Yes," nodded the doctor, "I suspected we should find M. le Curé's finger in the business somewhere. I'm a good Catholic, M. Renel, as you know; but, thank God, I'm no Jesuit."

"Dieu merci!" murmured M. Renel.

I told them, also, of Jean's statement that the château had held some strange occupant, of whom he had caught occasional glimpses. And, with sudden enlightenment, I told them of the old dog Bar's strange excitement in the park, and his death at the hands of Raoul for howling, as he had said, at the door of the château.

"The dog was with M. de Kerhuel the night he was lost," said M. Renel.

"And crawled home from somewhere down the river next day," said the doctor. "I remember. The old dog knew more than any of us, if he could only have spoken."

I told them, also, of the talk of the peasants at the fire the previous night—how they had seen the devil, and so on; and suggested that it was M. de Kerhuel whom they had seen, at which the doctor nodded.

I suddenly remembered the woman Félicité, whom we

had brought back to Kerhuel with us. Other matters had driven her completely out of my head.

"She must know all about it," I said.

"M. Renel and I have already questioned her," said Godefroi, "but she professes to know nothing."

"I will see her myself," said the doctor. He stood musing for a moment, and then turned to me. "Will you get me down my case of instruments, my boy?" And I ran upstairs for them.

I tapped at the door, and waited; but, as no reply came I went in.

Madame was kneeling by the bedside, with her husband's hand in hers, and they were talking in low tones, or perhaps the talking was all on her side. On his face was a look of great amazement. They were absorbed in one another, and I tiptoed quietly to the dressing-table and got the case of instruments.

"Yes, you can come, if you want to," said the doctor, in answer to my look of inquiry.

We went into the kitchen, where the old woman was sitting in a low chair, staring into the fire. There was no one else there.

"Félicité!" said the doctor abruptly.

"Eh b'en!" said the old woman, looking round at him.

He opened his case and laid it on the table, and her eyes fastened on the venomous looking little knives at once.

"I have just been operating on the gentleman upstairs," said the doctor. And he laid some of the knives out on the table. Then he took a piece of paper, and drew a lancet through it, as though to test its edge. "Now it is your turn."

"Mon dieu! M. le Docteur, I am all right!"

"Oh, nonsense! After going through a fire like that! See, this is chloroform; it will send you to sleep, and you will feel nothing at all. I can take both your legs off, and you'd never feel it."

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu! But there is nothing wrong with my legs, M'sieur, I do assure you."

She was standing up in great fright.

"Oh, nonsense! Perhaps I must cut a hole in your head, as we had to in Monsieur's upstairs. Maybe it's your throat needs looking to. No matter what it is, I can do it for you, and you'll never feel it till it's done. It's painful afterwards, of course, but——"

"But, Monsieur, I assure you there is nothing the matter——"

"Oh, pshaw! Don't waste my time, my good woman. A woman who can tell me what I want to know, and won't, has got to be operated on, of course. Just smell this quietly, now, and you'll go off like a top."

"Mais non! Mais non!" she screamed. "I will smell nothing."

"Then will you speak?"

"Mon dieu! And am I not speaking? What is it, then, that Monsieur desires?"

"Who was the man they kept in the room upstairs in the château?"

"But, Monsieur, I know not. He was there when first M. le Comte took me to the château, and he has been there ever since."

"But you saw him?"

"Only once, Monsieur, before last night."

"And when was that?"

"Once when he escaped, and fled into the woods, and M. Raoul and M. le Curé they found him and brought him home again."

"And who fed him?"

"M. le Comte always. No one else went in. He was very furious at times."

"What did they call him?"

"They spoke of him always as the Fool. I understood, Monsieur, that he was a son of M. le Comte's, who had been born so—bereft."

"But M. le Curé knew him, and saw him sometimes?"

"Mon dieu! It is possible. I know nothing of it. There is not much M. le Curé does not know."

"That is true; but you, you are probably lying." And

he picked up the biggest lancet, and took a couple of steps towards her.

"It is the truth, Monsieur!" she cried, shuffling behind the chair. "I swear it by the Holy Virgin and The Little One. I know no more about it."

"Very well," said the doctor grimly; "I shall wait. If ever I find you have been lying to me, I shall come and operate on you. Stay!" And he stopped picking up his instruments, and turned to her again. "How did the château get on fire last night?"

"I know not, Monsieur. It began up above, near the room where he slept. I slept below."

"And where did M. le Comte sleep?"

"He slept up above also—in the front ordinarily."

"And at other times, where?"

"Dame!" And she glared angrily at us, and then muttered, "How should I know?"

"Did you see him after the fire began?"

"No, I saw none but Jean-Marie, who dragged me from my bed, mon dieu!—it was like his impudence—and threw me in the bushes, and the Fool, who came out of the fire and ran away."

"Attention!" he said suddenly, with another idea in his mind; and he pulled out a pencil, and on the white-scrubbed table-top drew, with rough, jerky strokes, a full-sized representation of the weapon he had described to us. "Have you ever seen anything like that up at the château?"

"What is it?" she asked, peering close down at it. "A hammer?"

"No, this is sharp, and this is a spike. It is a foreign weapon."

"Mon dieu! They had many strange things on the walls. They may have had that."

"What did M. le Comte carry in his hand when he went in to the Fool to feed him?"

"C'est ça," she said quickly. "Yes, I have seen him carry a thing like that, Monsieur."

"Very well, Félicité. We shall see if you are telling the

truth." And we returned to the sitting-room, while the old woman, I have no doubt, did her best to imperil our future with her curses.

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu! Mon dieu! Mon dieu! Mon dieu!" said Godefroi, jumping up and smiting his right fist into his left palm in a fury of baffled understanding, when the doctor related what had passed. "What is it, then? What does it all mean?"

"I doubt if we shall ever know that in full, M. Godefroi," said the doctor very gravely. "But you may take it that your father was not drowned that time. He was struck down by some treacherous hand, and the blow affected his brain. He has been detained at Querhoal ever since, God alone knows with what object. He has been struck again—with the same weapon; whether by the same hand I cannot say—and that second blow has shown us the way to redress, I hope, the evil done by the first one. If he recovers, as I believe he will, all these last years will probably be blotted from his memory, and he will pick up his life at the point where it broke off."

"And will he not be able to help us to the perpetrators of this atrocity? Is no one to suffer for it?" asked Godefroi furiously.

"If he remembers anything of these intervening years, it would only be as in a dream. Nothing could be based on it."

"It is an infamy!"

"I doubt if we shall get much further—unless——"

"Unless? Unless what, M. le Docteur?"

"Unless you can induce M. le Curé to tell you. He knows all about it, I imagine."

"M. le Curé knows all about it?" gasped Godefroi; and sat down suddenly, as if he had been shot.

"Yes, M. le Curé knows all about it, unless I am very much mistaken."

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu!" said Godefroi; and thereafter remained very silent.

Presently M. le Commissaire and his gendarme put in an appearance on the track of Félicité, and—as concealment

could only cause future annoyance, and was besides practically impossible—Dr. Daly gave them the simple known facts, without any comments or ideas of his own; and, after partaking of wine, they went away swollen with importance, and the desire to communicate the astounding story.

Next morning, leaving Myrtle and my mother installed as guardian angels, and satisfied in my own mind that nothing would be lacking to our patient, I bade them all farewell, and started for Paris.

CHAPTER XVII.

TOUCH AND GO.

BEFORE me lay a task of very great difficulty and still greater danger, and there was no good blinking the fact.

Over a last smoke, the night before, I had given Myrtle my ideas on the subject, as fully as they could be given in advance, and in great ignorance of the actual condition of things round Paris. We had nothing but vaguest rumours to go upon, but it seemed impossible to doubt that the city was closely invested, and passage through the lines interdicted. A neutral, therefore, ran the double chance of being killed by either side as a spy before he had time to offer explanations, which in any case, and at best, would probably only extend his life by a very few minutes. My idea was to get down to Orléans, and work up to the south-east of Paris, strike the Seine, and at some point outside the Prussian cordon slip into the water and float down, bit by bit, till I got inside the French lines, and so into the city. Our last venture by water had been so successful that the idea of repeating it was the first that occurred to me; nor could much cudgelling of our united brains suggest anything more feasible.

"If you can only get to the river!" said Myrtle.

"That will be the trouble. Once in the water, I shall feel comparatively at home."

"And where do we meet, if I manage to get in, too?" asked my friend.

"Do you really think it is worth the risk, Hugh? I have every reason for going—I must go. With you it is different."

"My dear boy, if the old gentleman here goes on all right I shall be after you in a week. Where shall we meet?"

"At M. Dellieu's. You remember where it was?"

"Could find it blindfold if I once strike the Tuileries."

My baggage consisted of little more than the clothes I

stood in, a small bottle of brown stain for the face, the letter Surgeon-Major Cannot had given me, my passport, and about one thousand francs in gold—all that I could procure at the moment.

The Maire of Dinan was good enough to give me a letter supplementary to M. Cannot's, stating that I was known to him as a British subject of good position, and that the reason for my attempting to enter Paris was the fact that my fiancée, Mdlle. de Kerhuel, had entered the city some time before the investment, and had not since been heard of.

"I doubt if that will avail you much, M. Glyn, if you fall into the hands of the Prussians," he said. "They are terrible barbarians, I believe."

"I must take my chances, M. le Maire, and I thank you a thousand times for your kindness." And I was off.

Rennes, Laval, Le Mans, Tours, Orléans; and, so far, no great difficulties. Much suspicion on the part of understrappers towards the end, but hearty good wishes and assistance from their leaders as soon as I succeeded in getting to them.

Orléans I found in a state of panic. I walked in at the gate of the Faubourg St. Jean without question from anyone. The streets and quays were full of townsfolk, hysterically bewailing their fate at being left to the tender mercies of the barbarians, and full of furious invective against the heterogeneous mob of Turcos, Mobiles, Francs-tireurs, and a sprinkling of Linesmen, who were even then defiling in haste across the river. Every soul that wore a uniform, no matter how haphazard and scrappy its composition, seemed animated by but one thought, and that was to put the greatest possible distance between himself and the enemy in the shortest possible time. Neither prayers nor curses had the slightest effect on them, but the thought of the Prussians lent them wings.

As I came out on the Quai Cypierre a grand dispute was going on between the city fathers and the rear guard, which was preparing to blow up the great bridge. Sooner than lose their bridge, of which they were reasonably proud, the

civil authorities vowed the Prussians might trample it to their hearts' content, since these imbeciles of Moblots could not defend it. If it was to be blown up, they would be blown up with it. "Cowards! It is only unarmed Frenchmen you can destroy. If one but whispers 'Prussians,' you turn tail!" And so on, and so on. There came a sudden well-timed yell, "Les Prussiens, les Prussiens!" from the Rue Royale. The spectators on the Quai scattered and fled. The military decided that further argument was unseemly, and that their presence was required elsewhere. The bridge was saved, but there were no Prussians nearer than Chevilly.

I bought a blue blouse, and put it on over the *infirmier* uniform I had worn in Metz, and had retained ever since. With the képi and the blouse I made a very fair Franc-tireur, and, as such, jogged on to Montargeo, with views on Fontainebleau. The country people, however, said the Prussian cavalry were there, so I gave it wide berth, and struck across country by Chéroy, crossed the Yonne at Pont-sur-Yonne, and the Seine at Bray.

It was between Bray and Nangis, in the neighbourhood of a little place called Sonnevalle, that I had my first personal experience of the idiosyncrasies of Francs-tireurs.

I was plodding along in the dark, very much on the alert, as I knew the country thereabouts was a kind of Tom-Tiddler's ground, scoured constantly by both sides, and continually changing hands. It was as black as a hat, and I was put to much trouble to keep the road. I was proceeding with the utmost caution, and in absolute silence. Villefois stated that his men asserted that I was whistling. To that I answer—Is it likely? Besides, his men were a band of truculent ruffians, as devoid of truth as they were of uniform or the most elementary germs of manners; murderous scoundrels, with whom no gentleman would willingly associate, to whom a wounded Prussian was as a toad to a vicious schoolboy—a gift of the gods to be put to the torture. I grant you I was in good spirits at my success so far, and was thinking much of Marie, to whom every footstep brought me nearer. But whistling! It is a fable of the Francs-tireurs; and

men who will drop the hoe to bowl over a Prussian courier, and be quietly at work again with the gun hid in the hedge before the smoke has cleared away, will say and do anything. To that, Villefois' only answer is a lapse into proverbial philosophy, which I account but a weak form of argument at any time. "A la guerre, comme à la guerre," says he; and when I hint that there are methods of playing the game which are revolting to a fair-minded man, he gets angry, and says I had not had my horses and cattle seized, together with everything eatable by man or beast that was in sight, my house burnt over my head, and my wife and children turned adrift into the woods. And there he has me, especially as regards the wife and children; and I confess that under such circumstances I would probably have done much as the Francs-tireurs did, except as regards the wounded Prussians. To which, Villefois says that I would have attempted to cure them, and the result would have been the same to the Prussians, but longer of coming and much more painful. Then, having dealt that slogging blow, he recovers his good humour, and asserts that when I was hauled before him my face was whiter than his shirt; but, being put to the question, he admits that in those days his laundry bill was not a heavy one. Then, sometimes, by way of piling the coals on his head, I ask him how his arm is; and he works a fist like a leg of mutton to and fro to show me that, in his case, at all events, my efforts were not wanting in success.

I was on my back on the ground before I knew it, and, as far as I could make out, for my head was humming from a blow, there were seventeen different men on top of me, all swearing volubly in whispers.

I was secured before I could get my breath back, and then the seventeen got off my stomach, and kicked me till I stood up.

"I assure you, gentlemen," I said, "I am *not* a Prussian spy."

"Ah, bah! Shut up, you! If you are not a Prussian spy, what are you doing here, whistling signals to the cursed pigs over yonder? You are not of hereabouts, and your

accent is Prussian. Is it not so?" to the others; who replied, without a dissenting voice, that it undoubtedly was so.

"I am an Englishman," I said.

"It is the same thing," said the spokesman. "Is it not so?"

The Greek chorus replied that it was so.

"But," I said, "my papers will show who and what I am."

"Pooh! Anybody can manufacture papers."

Nevertheless, they ripped open my blouse, and the semi-military uniform below confirmed them in the certainty of my treachery. If I wasn't a spy, why did I wear uniform? "Pooh! Bah! It is evident! Jules, mon gars, drive your bayonet through his ribs."

"Attention, Messieurs!" I cried, with the expectation of the steel in my side at any moment. "I am an English surgeon attached to the French ambulance in Metz. I have just escaped from that town."

"Of course, it is somewhere down this way."

"And I am going into Paris——"

"Really!"

"With your permission, of course. But this is poor return for risking one's life assisting your wounded. Look at my papers; they will confirm all I say."

"Of course, you would be a fool else."

However, they pulled out my papers, and immediately asserted that they were in German; whereupon Jules of the bayonet prepared for action, and Paris and Marie seemed suddenly a very long way off.

"Attendez, mes gars!" said another voice. And the speaker, in low, quick tones, made some new suggestion, to which the others assented. They formed up round me, and a blow from the butt of a gun on the lowest joint of my spine intimated their desire that I should move forward, and at the same time almost deprived me of the power to do so.

We left the road, and plunged across country, and walked as fast as the ground would permit for, I reckoned, close on half an hour. Then we came among silent, scattered houses,

and, tapping gently on the window-shutter of one of them, the door opened and admitted us to an unlighted room. I was hauled through another doorway, and made to descend many wooden steps. When I got to the bottom of the ladder I found myself in a large and lofty stone-walled room, evidently underground, for the air smelt close after the cool night outside.

A small wood fire, in a wide chimney-place, with a very big iron pot hanging over it, and two or three candles stuck in bottles, lent an air of subdued cheerfulness to the opaque atmosphere, and on the wooden tables were bottles of wine of the country, which contributed to the same end.

On a broad-backed seat like a settle, coming out from the fireplace, lay a big man smoking a briar pipe. He had a very cheerful face, covered with sunny hair, and a very dirty shirt, open at the neck, and torn and bloody at the shoulder. Several more men sat smoking on the floor.

"Hola, Jarras! What have you got there?" asked the big man.

"A spy, Captain."

"Then what the devil did you bring him here for?"

"He says he's not a spy, Captain."

"Don't they all say that, you fool?"

"But he says he's an English surgeon."

"Ah! That's another story. Bring him here to me."

"Now, Monsieur"—to me, when I had been brought—"what is this? Do not trouble to lie. If you are an English surgeon, and can prove it, do so at once. If you can't, we shall be under the painful necessity of putting an end to you."

"Thank God, I've got to a sensible man at last," I said fervently. "Read the papers which one or other of your brigands took out of my pocket. If that isn't enough, I'll tackle that shoulder of yours, and set it right."

"Ah, bien! It is well said." And the bold, blue eyes shot a friendly look at me.

"You have been in Metz?" he said, looking up from the papers.

"Yes, I was working among the wounded there for six weeks."

"How did you get out?"

"Swam down the river in the night."

"Good. How were things with them when you left?"

"Not good. Much suffering."

"Will they get out?"

"No."

"And you want to get into Paris?"

"As quickly as possible, as you will understand from the papers there."

He nodded and asked, "Ma'm'selle is French?"

"Yes, of Brittany."

"Then Monsieur's sympathies are with us?"

"Do not my papers prove it, Monsieur?"

"Undoubtedly. Will you look at my shoulder at once, M. le Docteur? It is extremely painful."

I begged leave to wash my hands first, and water was instantly brought me in a small bowl.

"The bullet is still in," I said, "and it must come out at once. I need a lancet or a very sharp knife; it will not be difficult. It has gone right through to the back, carrying with it probably a piece of your coat and shirt. It lies just above the shoulder blade; and nothing, I think, is seriously damaged."

"Dieu merci!"

"Now, a knife—a sharp one—and some clean water and some soft rags, and I will have you comfortable in ten minutes. When was it?"

"Two nights ago." And to his men, "Who has got the sharpest knife among you, boys?"

Half a dozen were instantly produced. I selected the cleanest, and requested the owner to strop the small blade on a sword belt, and get the best point possible on it.

"We potted a patrol outside Fontainebleau, and had a hot quarter of an hour," said the wounded man; "but they got up reinforcements, and we had to cut for it. I was the only one hit. I think we settled half a score of them. But, mon dieu! What boots it half a score, or half a thousand?

They are legion, like the devils of Scripture; and, dieu-de-dieu, they are likewise swine. Would to God they would all run down a steep place and get drowned! These are terrible times for France, Monsieur Glyn. Why is it that our chastisement is so heavy? Our men are brave men."

"That's a very big question, Monsieur——"

"Pardon! Villefois is my name. Charles Villefois, at your service."

"I am Charles, also," I said.

"À la bonheur!" he said gaily. "Well, now—why?"

"Your top branches are rotten; I think the roots are all right. I saw your men at Spicheren and at Colombey. They fought bravely; but your leaders hesitate, and I should say their counsels are divided. At Mars-la-Tour and Gravelotte there were twenty thousand French dead and wounded——"

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu!" resounded all round me, in tones of angry grief, for the others were all listening intently, even Tisson stopped his energetic stropping.

"And quite as many Germans——"

"Dieu merci!" in tones of much relief and satisfaction.

"But the German losses result in victory, and the French losses, so far, have not. Given equal forces—and you have generally been outnumbered—brains would turn the scale."

"It is very true," said Villefois, with a shrug that made him wince. "We have lacked a head, and the poor Badinguet was not equal to it. Where is he now, Monsieur?"

"He is at Wilhelmshöhe, in Germany. He was, at all events, when I passed through Luxembourg; and the Empress and the young Prince are in England. Now, M. Tisson, is the knife ready?"

The knife was handed to me, and proved adequate. I could feel the bullet below the skin, and a couple of cuts brought out first a scrap of linen, then a scrap of woollen cloth, and finally the bullet itself. I placed them all in Villefois' palm.

"Your property, M. Villefois."

"I look on this as a loan," he said, fingering the bullet. "I will return it, or its equivalent, with interest."

I cleansed the wound as thoroughly as I could, and bound it up both back and front; and also bound his arm to his side to keep it out of action.

"Give it complete rest, and renew those bandages every night and morning, and it should heal up all right."

"No permanent injury?" asked Villefois.

"Not if you attend to my instructions."

"I am very greatly indebted to you, M. Glyn. I will help you forward all I can; but I am loth to let you go, for you will certainly get shot by the Prussians."

"If you'll do what you can for me, I'll try and do the rest," I said.

"Now, boys, supper. Are your men posted outside, Jarras?"

"All alive, Captain."

We supped excellently off soup from the big *pot-au-feu*, and the boiled meat that also came out of it, and coarse brown bread and cheese, and very good red wine from the bottles on the tables.

"What is this place?" I asked of M. Villefois as we ate.

"It is the underground chapel of a monastery that once stood here. I used it as a wine cellar; but the vintage this year is of another kind, and will not be bottled. We have had other things to think of. My vineyards are trampled into mud; my house is in ruins. My wife and children I was fortunately able to send to Bordeaux to my father, so I have no anxiety on their account. I do not think the Prussian devils will get as far as that. Did you come through Orléans, M. Glyn?"

"I was there two days ago."

"And how was it with them?"

"They were all off their heads, it seemed to me. The troops had crossed the river, and wanted to blow up the big bridge, and the townspeople wouldn't let them."

"We want a head," he said gloomily. "A strong man—one man—might save France yet, if he were strong enough to act alone, and make the others obey him. It is the too many heads that are our ruin."

After supper Villefois produced tobacco, and the atmo-

sphere became thick enough to cut with a knife, although the trap-door at the head of the stairs was left open.

"It is warm, at any rate," said my host; "and the nights up above begin to grow cold."

We talked of many things over our pipes, and I saw that to my new friend it was a great enjoyment. We talked till the rest were snoring in their blankets on the floor. He again expressed regret that I must go. "But, pardon! I was forgetting Ma'm'selle. I wish with all my heart, mon cher, that you may succeed in getting through, and may find Ma'm'selle all right. What are your plans?"

I told him briefly what I thought of trying.

"If you can take the water near enough to the city to stand the swim, I see no reason why you should not get through," he said. "The difficulty will be to get there. I can get you within fair reach of the rear of the German lines, but how you will get through them I don't know."

"Where does the line on this side cross the river?"

"At Choisy bridge."

"And how far is that from Paris?"

"Roughly speaking, five miles; but their patrols are all over the country behind. It's a clean, sharp front, you see, but a wide-sweeping tail, and it's the tail that will bother you. And then, if you manage to get past the Germans without being shot for a French spy, the Moblots outside Paris will shoot you for a German spy. It's a nice little task you've set yourself, my friend."

"I must trust to Providence and good luck."

"They are the friends of a brave man. You would like to go to-morrow—that is, to-day?"

"I would like to be there now, but I shall stop here another day, to see that that shoulder is going on all right."

"That is very good of you." And he stretched out his hand, and took mine in a hearty grip. "And to think," he said, "that those cursed fools—— But, no, I withdraw; they are poor men, and uneducated, and they have suffered cruelly. All the same, I'm glad they didn't shoot you. The loss would have been mine."

"And mine to some extent."

"Truly this is not a healthy country for tourists at the moment. And you really do not think, M. Glyn, that the other Powers will intervene, even to save Paris from bombardment?"

"I fear not."

"It is monstrous! Paris to be levelled to the ground by these barbarians!"

"Suppose it was London. Would you intervene?"

"London is not Paris. Paris belongs to all the world."

"I'm afraid all the world considers that Paris brought it on herself. Did you yourself want this war, for instance?"

"Mon dieu! No. War is horror. No one knows it till they have seen it; but when one's country is beaten on to her knees, one does what one can to strike a blow for her. But," he said mournfully, "the blows such as we can strike are like pin-pricks in the hide of an elephant."

"Why don't you join the Army of the Loire, and regularise yourself?"

"I can't stand the officers. Fools of any kind are a weariness to me; but when they are insolent and overbearing fools, then I want to trample on them."

I told him in a few words the story of Jean de Kerhuel.

"I know it," he said. "I had a friend, a very dear friend; him, too, they shot in just the same way. A corporal, who had only had his step a week, struck him. My friend struck back. They took him out and shot him—to encourage the others to accept everything in silence. If my friend had struck that blow a week earlier, it would have passed unnoticed. That seven days cost him his life."

"When do you generally go to bed?" I asked at last, feeling very tired myself.

"I haven't been to bed for a month," he said; "but it's high time we got between the blankets. The enjoyment of meeting a sensible man, to use your own words, has made me selfish. I ask your pardon."

I helped him to such comfort as a pair of rather thin blankets could afford, and lay down alongside him and fell asleep in a moment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT HAPPENED UNDERGROUND.

The room was empty when I woke up, and Villefois came down the wooden ladder while I was still sitting among my blankets.

"How's the shoulder?" I asked.

"Bit stiff, but feels happier than it did. You slept well?"

"Yes; I was tired out."

"Come upstairs and have some coffee; it's a glorious morning." And I followed him up the ladder.

The trap-door opened, I found, in the floor of a little outhouse, which was lighted only by one small window of bottle-glass, set in the roof. Round two sides of this room were great piles of winter firing: branches of trees and small logs sawn into short lengths, with beards of dried moss hanging to them. They were ranged in a somewhat peculiar way, and bound to the sides of the room with cords to keep them from falling down into the cellar. Villefois saw me looking at them, and said, "That is our screen, in case of a visit from the enemy—our first line of defence. A tug at those knots, when the trap is down, and all that wood lies on top of it, and it looks as if it had been there for years, and would be a day's work to clear it. We have had more than one call from them, but they have never penetrated the screen."

"And the second line of defence?" I asked.

"Fire and steel, if we happen to be at home. This is sanctuary, and would be defended at any cost."

"And where are all your men now?"

"In the air and in the ground. Up trees, in hedges and ditches and holes—watching, watching, watching all the time!"

The sole occupant of the cottage, which was poorly furnished, and offered no attractions to marauders, was an

ancient woman, in a very white mob cap, which contrasted vividly with the creased brown parchment of her face. She was sitting over the hearth, smoking a short, black pipe, and watching two old tin coffee-pots which stood knee deep in the white wood ashes.

"Coffee, Babette, if you please," said Villefois. And the old crone got out three bowls, and filled them to the brim with deliciously smelling coffee and milk.

"Is he a Prussian?" she asked, blinking at me.

"No, my old one, or he wouldn't be here, as you know very well. He's a doctor, who has mended my shoulder. Babette doesn't love the Prussians," he said to me.

"They killed my man and my boy," she growled. "I would cut the throat of every cursed one I found. Mon dieu! Yes." And she looked quite capable of it.

"Ah-ha! Milk this morning, Babette? You are a famous housewife. Where did the milk come from?"

"The old Lajaille brought it up," croaked the old woman; "but there is no sugar."

"One can't have everything in war time," said Villefois philosophically.

The coffee was excellent, even lacking sugar; and we had sweet, dark-coloured bread, without butter.

The cottage door was wide open, and the country-side was flooded with sweet sunshine. The silence outside was studded with a dull thudding, which occasionally ran into a continuous roll, like distant thunder.

"They are fighting down Chevilly way," said Villefois; and stopped eating now and again when the rumbling waxed louder and longer.

The meal finished, he went to the door, and looked warily out before issuing. I followed, and we stood outside.

There were perhaps half a dozen houses in all, but apparently all empty. Behind the cottage lay the tumbled and very ancient ruins of the old monastery, a vast pile of brown, weather-beaten stones. Behind them several tall trees; and, looking towards them, Villefois called, "You are awake, Léon?" And a voice from the topmost branches

replied, "But yes, Monsieur, I am awake, of course." And presently,

"They are fighting over yonder," said the voice.

"I hear them. Keep a sharp look out, mon gars."

We sat down on a wooden bench by the door and smoked, and then I bathed the wounded shoulder, and readjusted the bandages. It was a good deal inflamed, but not more than I would have expected.

Villefois pointed out the remains of his vineyards. "My own house is three miles from here towards Fontainebleau," he said; "but it is occupied by the Prussians, curse them! In good times the land brings me in thirty thousand francs a year; and here I am like a rat in a hole, and, ma foi, glad enough to have so big a hole to lie in."

"Tiens! Monsieur," came a sharp call from the tree, "'y a que' qu' chose, là-bas."

"What is it, then?"

A moment's silence, and then:

"Horsemen. They are coming here." And a small boy of perhaps fourteen, with a thin, dark face, and black eyes blazing with excitement, came sliddering down the tree and danced upon the ground.

"We had better go in, M. Glyn," said Villefois quietly; and knocked out his pipe and stamped the ashes into the earth, and led the way, the small boy dancing excitedly in the rear.

"They are coming again, Babette," he said, as we passed through the cottage. "You know what to do?"

"Si, si, allez, vite, vite! Dieu! If I could only kill one with my own hand," said the old crone excitedly.

He made me go first, and drew down the trap behind him; and in a moment the piles of firing fell thundering on top of it.

"Will they be all safe upstairs?" I asked in a whisper.

"Quite safe," he whispered back; "safer than the Prussians would be if Babette had any poison, and could induce them to drink coffee. They shot her husband and her son—the boy's father—the first time they came. Certainly, Léon

had been shooting at them from behind hedges whenever he got the chance."

It was pitch dark, but the air was fairly fresh, and there was evidently some little ventilation somewhere. There was no fire, and Villefois, taking my hand, drew me round the wall to the large open hearth.

"Stand here, and we may hear what passes," he whispered. "This chimney runs round into the chimney of the cottage." And we stood and listened intently.

Before long we plainly heard the arrival of the unwelcome guests, their brusque German voices, and Babette's growls in reply; but it was impossible to make out the words.

It occurred to me that my position was a peculiarly unpleasant one. If by any mischance they should poke round till they discovered the cellar, I would not give a halfpenny for my own life. I should be simply a Franc-tireur caught red-handed, and all such were shot on sight, so Villefois had assured me the night before. I listened anxiously for the sounds above to die away, betokening their departure; but, instead, I heard them laughing and joking, and evidently making themselves quite at home. They had possibly smelt coffee, and insisted on having some. It was a trying hour I spent in that chimney-place; but there was worse to come.

Down the chimney-shaft came the sound of snatches of song and much laughter, and then we heard the humming of a song through the trap-door above us; then a tentative movement of the logs, as though some curious member of the party were poking casually round to see what was what. Then we heard distinctly an exclamation of surprise from the enterprising one, and more stir above the trap-door, and Villefois pressed my arm.

"If they come down, I have no option but to kill them—if I can," he whispered. "I wish you had gone, but it is too late now. You understand? If one of them escapes, our sanctuary is violated. It is the lives of all my men or mine."

There was no doubt about their intention to come down. The logs were being systematically dragged off the trap. They probably expected to find wine or supplies of some kind. In any case, a trap-door concealed below a wood pile was too tempting to resist.

"Get behind that settle," whispered Villefois, "and don't move whatever happens." And I glided softly behind the settle, and knelt there, my heart thumping furiously.

At last the trap was all clear; and with a merry sing-song they heaved it up, and a dim light streamed down.

"Hola! Below there!" cried a brusque voice in German; and then, "Gott! It's as dark as Hades." And a heavy, spurred foot came wandering down the ladder. It stopped doubtfully, but those above urged him on. They wanted to be in at the find, too.

"Johann wants his horse," said one above. "He's always at sea on dry land." And they all laughed and scuffled like schoolboys for next place on the ladder. It was a long ladder, and they came crowding down it to their death as merrily as to a feast.

They had to come down backwards because of their spurs, and the lowest man shouted to the one above him to have a care, or he would hook his eyes out.

Then, suddenly, the topmost man, whose feet were still feeling for the rungs of the ladder, collapsed with a groan, and fell heavily against the man below. At the same moment the trap was flung down, and in the dark Villefois' revolver spoke. The bottom man, who was just setting foot to ground, sank with a groan, and yells and curses broke out from those above. The revolver cracked again, and instantly again, in the light of its own flash, which was all the light the shooter had to go by. Then there was silence, broken only by the groans of dying men. And the sharp smell of the powder whiffed about the cellar.

Three were down; I thought there were two left.

Villefois made a movement beside me, and at the far end of the room there came a crash of something falling, it

sounded like a brick. Two instant flashes shot out from the ladder, an answering flash from the chimney corner, and another body fell from the ladder.

There was only one left. He must have been a brave lad, for he sprang from the ladder, rushed clattering towards the fireplace, and ran full tilt into it.

"Gott! It is useless!" he cried furiously. "I surrender."

There came two more quick shots from the middle of the room, one for the flash and one for the end, and it was all over.

For a moment—silence. Then I heard Villefois groping towards the ladder.

"God have mercy on them, and on me!" he said, with a shake in his voice. "There was no help for it."

He stumbled slowly up the ladder, and thumped on the trap till the old woman slipped back a bolt and he could raise it with his head and climb out; and I followed him quickly, feeling very sick at the whole business.

Old Babette's sunken eyes were glowing like hot coals, and the boy Léon's sparkling like diamonds.

"Are they all dead?" asked the old woman hungrily.

"They are dead," said Villefois. "Let me get out; I am choking."

"Ah-ha! God be thanked! I put the knife into one of them," chuckled the crone. "That is for my man; the boy is still to pay for."

Léon had disappeared into the cellar.

I found Villefois on the bench outside, with his head in his right hand.

"That was horrible, horrible!" he groaned; "especially the last one. But it had to be. Curse it all! Curse it all! And ten thousand curses on those who brought it all about."

The troopers' horses, spruce and neat, were hitched to a nail in the wall. They stood quietly, waiting the return of their masters.

Villefois sprang up and went into the cottage.

"Léon, Léon, vite! What are you doing down there,

you little devil! Here, I want you." And Léon crawled up the ladder. He might only have been examining the men below to see if they were dead. He might have been emptying their pockets; his hands were red.

"Take off those saddles," said Villefois; "we will pitch them into the cellar." And he helped with the girths as well as one hand would let him. "Now mount, and carry them towards Villenelle. You cannot cross the river. When you have gone ten miles, take off the bridles, and turn them loose, and come home."

The boy rode off bareback, with two horses on each side of him. Villefois carried the saddles, one by one, into the cottage, and flung them down into the cellar, and came and sat down on the bench again. And the sun shone down upon us, soft and bright and peaceful, as if there were no such things in the world as battle and murder and sudden death.

It was a horrible experience. War is horrible. I do not judge this man, for I had not suffered what he had suffered, and so could not enter fully into his feelings.

But I know that to him also it was horrible, and foreign to his nature; and that he had done what he had done simply because, from his point of view, it had to be done, and there was no escape from it.

He kept silence for a very long time, and when at last he broke it, it was to say gently to me:

"You must go on to-night, M. Glyn. I regret much that I kept you—for this."

I was glad to hear him say it, for another night in that cellar would have been more than I cared for.

Charles Villefois has sent me many a barrel of good red wine since those days. Sometimes, when drinking it, the remembrance of what passed that day in the cellar, where it may have lain to ripen, has come over me, and the taste of it has changed suddenly between two sips.

We remained all day on the bench by the door, on the look-out for the enemy. The old woman, still chuckling to herself, brought us food; and we sat and smoked, and looked

out over the quiet country, and listened to the dull thud-thudding away over to the south-west.

Towards nightfall the men began dropping in with their news. When they heard of the day's doings at the cottage they were full of exultation. Villefois ordered them to dig a big hole some distance away, and to hurry the job through before it was dark. Then they hauled up the dead men; and a most horrible sight was old Babette, as she clapped her skinny hands with unholy glee at sight of her particular victim, and reclaimed her big bread knife. He had bled dreadfully, which seemed to add to her enjoyment.

"That is mine, that one; see you. Did I strike true? Ma foi! Yes. That pays for my old man; the boy is still to pay for. That will come, à la bonheur! Please God, and all in good time, that will come too."

I was glad Babette had no more meals to prepare for me.

I dressed Villefois' shoulder once more before it got quite dark; and then he called up two of his men—Jarras, his lieutenant, and one named Casconne—and talked with them at considerable length as to my journey. There were plans and suggestions, and counter-plans and new suggestions; and, in the end, nothing more was decided than that these two should lead me, by cross-country ways, to as near as they dared go to the rear of the German cordon in the neighbourhood of Villeneuve St. George, which lay on the Seine about eight miles from Paris. The district would be full of Francs-tireurs, but from them I should be safe with my companions.

Then Villefois shook me very warmly by the hand, and wished me good luck.

"Perhaps," he said gloomily, "when we have drunk the cup to the dregs, we may meet again in happier times, M. Glyn. If not, one of us, at all events, will never forget that we once met."

We walked rapidly, and for the most part in silence. M. Jarras ventured the remark that this had been a good day for them, for he had himself shot a courier, on the Melun road. He also suggested that if the captain had been quite

himself he would have kept the horses and uniforms of the patrol, and used them to good advantage in striking further blows; but I could not work up any enthusiasm on the subject, and conversation dwindled.

We walked all through the night, and at daylight found lodgment, and some scraps of hay for bedding, in the loft of a burnt-out farm. We kept watch-about all through the day, munching brown bread and fragments of cold meat, which we had brought with us for meals, and washing the food down with draughts from the well below. Twice during the day we got a sight of distant horsemen, but no one disturbed us; and as soon as it was dark we set off again towards the north. Three times that night we walked into the lurking-places of bands of Francs-tireurs, but a whispered conversation between them and my guides set us on our way again, and each time with a welcome contribution to our commissariat; and twice we lay face to the ground while cavalry patrols clanked past much closer than my companions considered desirable. There was no great difficulty in escaping the patrols, they were audible and visible from a distance; but the sudden stealthy encirclement of the Francs-tireurs, who seemed to rise out of the ground, was startling in the extreme.

We must have made very wide circuits, and more than once we had to try back and go round, when my guides learned that bodies of Prussians lay ahead. We crossed a river in a punt, which was put at our disposal by some Francs-tireurs, one of whom crossed with us, and carried the boat back to the other side. It was softening towards daylight when we drew into a wood; and when we reached the further side Jarras whispered:

"Voilà, Monsieur; that is Villeneuve St. George, down there by the railroad and the river; Choisy is five miles down stream. We cannot take you further; it is dangerous country this."

I thanked them very warmly, and hinted at remuneration; but they would not hear of it.

"Monsieur's heart is towards France, that is enough,"

said Jarras. "Adieu, and good luck!" And with a final shake of the hand, and an exhortation to caution, they disappeared among the trees, leaving me to play out my own hand, and to muse, meanwhile, on the slenderness of the dividing lines between men and men, and between life and death. A night or two ago these peasants were ready to cut my throat simply because they were not then aware that "my heart was towards France." For the last two days they had carried their lives in their hands for me. They were going back to their murderous work of slaughtering every Prussian they could safely lay hands on or put bullets into, because *their* hearts were not towards France. As between man and man, there was no reason for this deadly hatred, which transformed men into fiends incarnate. Some men, called Prussians, had harried their houses, and passed on, and were probably by this time under the sod. And so everything in Prussian uniform—everything, indeed, that was not palpably on the side of France—must suffer vicarious punishment, by lead and fire and steel, on every possible opportunity!

And beyond there, by the lead-coloured river, the white houses of Villeneuve St. George began to glimmer in the half-light of the dawn; and five miles down stream lay Choisy, and a few miles beyond that Paris; and somewhere in Paris—Marie! Where, and in what case, I wondered much; and longed, like the singer of old, for the wings of a dove, that I might float above the obstacles of earth, and find my heart's delight, and rest.

CHAPTER XIX.

I FALL INTO STRANGE GOOD COMPANY.

I HAD pondered much during our night-journeying as to the next move in the game, but so much depended on circumstances that it had been impossible to make any definite plan.

Two plain courses were open to me. I could try the Metz plan of floating down stream into the city. It was a much longer course than at Metz, and fraught with infinitely more difficulties. If I was discovered, either by Prussians or Frenchmen, I should be shot to a certainty, before I could begin to explain my innocence of any evil intent.

The other plan was to march straight up to the first Prussian post, and endeavour to enlist the sympathies of the officer in charge. That also might prove a risky proceeding. My papers might satisfy them that I was a non-combatant, but they would also prove my French sympathies; and then, discipline in the Prussian army was so strict that any officer into whose hands I fell would probably feel that he had no option but to forward me promptly to headquarters—if, indeed, he did not save himself that trouble by shooting me out of hand.

Here, face to face with Villeneuve and the necessity for a prompt decision, I weighed both propositions carefully and finally, and was drawn more and more to the latter course. On the face of it, it seemed the bolder plan, but, after much consideration, I was not sure that it did not, after all, eliminate some of the chances of being shot.

Crawling along the high road came an apparently endless train of laden waggons, escorted by a troop of lancers. They rumbled slowly across the pontoon bridge, and creaked away towards the west; and away in the direction of Paris big guns began suddenly a furious fusillade, and I thought surely the Prussians must be trying to carry the city by assault. I got up and made my way through the wet grass

to the high road, and tramped sturdily towards the village. Presently, on the road in front, I saw a Prussian sentry watching me stolidly. He let me approach within speaking distance without moving a muscle; then he asked:

"Who goes?"

"A friend!" I said in German.

"Advance, friend, and give the word."

"I don't know the word," I said, in my stumbling German. "I want your commanding officer."

He dropped his bayonet to the level of my ribs, and looked at me. He was an uncommonly handsome lad, with bold, blue eyes, and crisp yellow hair, and downy indications of a moustache which looked white against the healthy red of his face.

"You're not going to hurt him, are you?" he said, with a quizzical grin. And, then, looking curiously at my uniform, for I had shed my blouse along with the Francs-tireurs, "But you're not a Frenchman?"

"No; I'm an Englishman."

"What a silly fool you must be," he said in perfect English; and added quickly, "to be here, I mean."

"That's as it may be," I said. "I'm glad you speak English, anyhow; I'd about got to the end of my German."

"Didn't reach far, did it?" he laughed. "Now, what is it you want?"

"I want to get into Paris."

"Same here!" he laughed again. "But we don't find it healthy to walk straight in along the high road, and I doubt if you would either. What do you want to get in for? You're a great deal better off outside. I suppose you're a bit mad, like most Englishmen."

"I think you know Englishmen better than that; you must have lived among us to speak so well."

"Dear boy, I lived in London for two years—122, Lower Hamilton Terrace, Maida Vale; green 'bus up Edgware Road, fare threepence from the Bank; or, if preferred, Underground Railway viâ Baker Street, whose atmosphere partakes of the hereafter."

I laughed outright at the incongruity of all this, and he laughed out also.

"Very nice house, I assure you, only the landlady's cat was a confirmed inebriate, and persisted in drinking my whisky. What kind of a uniform do you call that? It seems to me a cross between the little man's in the red cap at the corner of Chancery Lane and a French ambulance attendant's."

"You're not far out; I'm a surgeon, attached to the French ambulance in Metz."

"In Metz?" And he pricked up his ears. "Bit off your beat, aren't you? Were you in Metz?"

"I was there up to a fortnight ago."

"The deuce you were. How did you get out?"

"I swam down the river."

"The devil you did! And why? Had enough of it?"

"I had matters outside to attend to—private matters'

"Ah, ha! I see." And the blue eyes twinkled knowingly. "And where is the young lady?"

"In Paris."

He looked at me keenly, and then nodded. "I understand. And you want to get in to look after her?"

"Exactly! She went in to nurse her brother before you gentlemen squatted here, and since then we have heard nothing from her."

He nodded, looked all round the country-side to see if anything was moving, and then said, "If you'll wait here with me till I'm relieved, I'll take you to the commander of the post. He's not a bad sort; a bit bumptious at times, but sufferable as a rule, unless it's Francs-tireurs. He's got 'em on the brain, and a bit of 'em in his hind leg. His name's von Marcius, and he's my big brother. He's engaged to an English girl, by the way, Miss Maud Pargiter, daughter of old Pargiter, of Harley Street. Know her?"

"I know the old man well enough; I've worked under him. It seems to me I've fallen on my feet. I'm very much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it. If you've any tobacco on you, I don't mind joining you in a smoke."

I pulled out what I had, and he filled a big-bowled pipe, and I my briar.

"French cabbage," he said contemptuously; "I'll give you some up yonder that'll make your hair curl; but I came out with half a pouch, and got to the end of it an hour ago. God bless Walter Raleigh, if it really was him who discovered tobacco; but I'm inclined to think it must have been a German."

We chatted pleasantly till the relief came along. They eyed me curiously.

"English friend of the captain's," said young von Marcius to the relief officer. "I'll take him to him."

We tramped martially into Villeneuve, and my new friend led me to the captain's quarters in the principal hotel. He walked upstairs, and tapped on a door.

"Herein!" said a voice inside, and we walked in. A tall man in blue was sitting at table, just about to begin breakfast. The delicious smell of the coffee made my mouth water.

"Hello, Heinrich!" he said. "Who's this?"

"Friend of Dr. Pargiter's," said Heinrich in English. "We've come to have breakfast with you." And he began sniffing at the viands on the table.

Captain von Marcius sprang up, and held out his hand.

"Any friend of Dr. Pargiter's is very welcome to me," he said heartily. "How did you get here, my dear sir, and where do you come from?"

"Walked up against my bayonet, and began to babble hieroglyphics, under the belief that he was talking German," said Heinrich. "I say, Leo, I move for a triple supply of those kidneys and eight more eggs. Any to the contrary? It's a vote." And he rang the bell.

"He's not really cracked, you know," said the elder brother laughing; "but he amuses himself that way, and, as a rule, he's quite harmless. Now, my dear sir, tell me all about yourself, and what I can do for you. Have you seen my dear old friend the Doctor lately, and how was he?"

"I saw him last in July," I said, "and he spent fifteen minutes begging me not to make a fool of myself, while he was taking off the half of a man's foot that had been crushed by a cart."

"Ay, and how were you proposing to make a fool of yourself? Heinrich, leave enough of those kidneys for our friend to make a beginning on. By the way, I don't know your name yet."

"Charles Glyn, student at Bart's."

"I have heard the old man speak of you, Mr. Glyn. If I may say so without the appearance of flattery, he had much belief in your future. You took very good places, I believe, in your degree exams."

"I have the M.B. and B.S., and was to have gone in for my M.D. and M.S. in December; but I wanted to see some practical work on the field, and so I came to the wars."

"What corps?" And he too looked curiously at my uniform.

"I went to Paris. Couldn't get an appointment as surgeon, so went to the front as infirmier with Frossard's corps."

"Frossard? Then you were at Spicheren, and, I suppose, in Metz?"

"Yes; I and a friend who had come out with me worked in Metz for a month, and terrible work it was. We got our grades there, and did our proper work."

"You'd better tackle those kidneys, Mr. Glyn, or that boy will hurt himself, and leave you none."

"Mr. Glyn hasn't been on outpost since two o'clock this morning," said Heinrich, with his mouth full. "They do you credit, Leo. I wish you'd invite me to breakfast every morning."

"I didn't invite you this morning——"

"Oh, my! You said, 'Come in!' I heard you distinctly."

"If you came every morning, you'd get fat and out of condition, and unable to do your duty. Field fare is best for boys in the ranks."

"While their superior officers revel in devilled kidneys and all the delicacies of the season."

"Brain wear and tear needs suitable recognition. Here come the hot ones, Mr. Glyn," as an attendant brought in the smoking dish. "Pray help yourself; and, if I may say so without discourtesy, quickly. We shall have business on hand shortly." At which his brother pricked up his ears. "Why didn't you join our side?"

"Well, I'm bound to say we never expected in England that things would go as they have done."

"It's been a frightful buckle-up, hasn't it? How do *you* account for it, Mr. Glyn?"

"Before the first shot was fired, a friend of mine in Dinan, the pastor of the Reformed Church there, said to me, 'The Germans fear God, and live clean. We, as a nation, do not, and we shall pay for it.'"

"He was right," said the captain, with much earnestness. "That is the root of the whole matter. France has proved most astonishingly rotten in her high places. The rank and file, as a rule, fight well, but their leaders are not worth that." And he snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"I'm afraid it's impossible not to feel that the clearance that is going on will be beneficial. My sympathies, I'm bound to say, are French——"

"Engaged to a French girl—shut up in Paris—wants to get to her," said Heinrich, as he chipped his third egg.

"Is that so?" asked his brother, looking at me.

I stated briefly the facts of the case.

"It's only natural you should want to get in," said the captain. "I'll think it over, and see what I can do. As a matter of form, I will ask you, if you do succeed in getting in through any help I can render you, to pass me your word not to convey any information whatever."

"I pledge you my word I will not. I have no interest to serve except Mdlle de Kerhuel's, and my own so far as she is concerned."

"That is enough. I will accept your word, and I will help you all I can; as you would help me in like case."

We had barely lighted the cigars which Heinrich rooted out by instinct, and made free with as a matter of course,

when a horseman came galloping down the street, and quick feet came up the stair. A few hasty words at the door, and Captain von Marcius picked up his helmet and sword and turned to us.

"Off to your own place, Heinrich, my boy. They are coming out in force, and we are to hasten up to Choisy. Come with me, Mr. Glyn. If you have your Geneva badge with you, put it on; it will stop inquiries. Now, see," he said quickly, as Heinrich's footsteps died away on the stairs, and the bugles rang out outside, "this may be your chance. Keep as close to me as you can. We shall drive them in again; if you manage well, you might get back with them. It'll be risky, but it's a chance."

I thanked him heartily, and we ran down the stairs together.

In five minutes we were pounding over the pontoons at a quickstep, and the faces behind us were all aglow with anticipation. I caught sight of Heinrich in the third front rank as they filed past us for their captain's keen inspection; and he winked solemnly at me, and champed his jaw to show me that, whatever happened, he was, at all events, an excellent breakfast to the good.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SHAMEFUL END OF QUERHOAL.

THE noise of heavy artillery in front of us grew louder and louder as we stepped briskly along the road towards Choisy.

"Those are their forts, Bicêtre, Ivry, possibly also Montrouge," said von Marcius. "The forts always tell us where they're going to try and break out. It is considerate, but short-sighted, on their part; but, in any case, we have other means of knowing, and we are always ready for them. Ah, now! That is the chassepôt," as sharp, quick rolls of firing reached us. "They have got well out to-day. Jawohl! They will have all the further to go back. What's this, now?"

This was a staff-officer in gold spectacles, who rode briskly up, and deflected us from the direct road to Choisy into a road which led due east. We passed through a village crammed with the waggons of a supply train, probably the one I saw pass in the early morning. Then we turned north again along a fine, wide high-road, which von Marcius informed me was the Imperial route to Fontainebleau.

Then off again towards the north-east, with the sound of the firing now very close, and the smoke rising in dense clouds just ahead.

"Now, Glyn, good-bye," said the captain; "take any chance that turns up. We're going in there, and some of us will never come out again."

I wrung his hand, and stepped on one side. Heinrich von Marcius winked gaily at me as he passed, and they headed gallantly into the smoke and turmoil.

I could see nothing but smoke, and as I seemed to be about the centre of the storm I deemed it wise to execute a flank movement towards the east, which was also to windward.

The big, booming guns of the forts had stopped now, the combatants were too much mixed up, but the crash of

field-guns and rattling volleys of musketry were ceaseless. It seemed to me impossible that anyone venturing into that inferno could possibly hope to come out alive.

I ran on round the rear of the German advance, and ran the faster when an ill-aimed shell screamed over my head, and plugged into the ground on my left, and scattered the mould in all directions. Some distance ahead, and well out of the line of fire, I saw some buildings, and I made for them as hard as I could pelt. I came to a stone wall, panted round it till I found a gateway, ran through it, and stumbled headlong over the green mounds and small wooden crosses of a graveyard into the open doorway of a church. It was evidently doing duty for a barracks at present. There were half a dozen smouldering wood fires on the stone floor, but there was no one about.

Here I was safe enough, but I wanted to see what was going on outside. As soon as I had recovered my wind, I looked about till I found the entrance to the church tower, and, running up a flight of circular stone steps, found a small round chamber under the slate roof, with openings all round it just below the eaves.

From this a bird's-eye view of the nearer portion of the battle-field was obtainable, and I watched eagerly.

The hardest fighting seemed to be going on on my right, which before long became also the German right. The firing was so incessant that the smoke hid the movements from me. To my surprise, for I had imagined myself outside the actual fighting zone, I heard firing on the left hand as well. It struck me very forcibly that my position might, in certain circumstances, become none of the pleasantest; and before I could change it those circumstances occurred.

The hot fight in the centre swung slightly backwards, as the Germans momentarily gave way, and the French pressed them harder and harder. German reinforcements came racing up, and the French in turn were forced back. They caught sight of my church and graveyard, and swept into it in a flood, turning it at once into a strong defensive position.

The wall of the churchyard bristled with flame and smoke. Hot feet raced up the stone steps, and in a moment my little round room was filled with sweating, panting men. They were brawny peasant lads, with raw, red faces, and yellow hair, which in some cases hung down to their shoulders. I knew them in a moment for Breton Mobiles. I had seen many of their kind hanging about Morlaix and St. Brieuc, and other small coast ports, in stocking caps and thick blue jerseys. They gave me a homely feeling. The first comers seemed surprised at sight of me, but the Geneva cross on my arm satisfied them, and time was precious. They faced round instantly, and the room was full of smoke, which poured from the windows as if the place were on fire. The only sounds I could hear were the shuffling of their slipshod feet, their smothered ejaculations in an uncouth tongue, and the pattering of empty cartridge-cases on the floor. They fired with what seemed to me at that time marvellous rapidity. Whether they hit anything, I was quite unable to see. No bullets came back our way. Probably the smoke from below hid the small church tower. Then, above the din I heard a dominating note. A great explosion shook the tower, and the men with their backs to me broke out into language of a peculiarly jaw-breaking description.

"Obus!" said one, and "Bombe!" said another, and they all craned over to see the effect of the shell on their comrades below.

Then I, being at the back, where the view was comparatively clear, saw this sight:

A large body of men was racing swiftly for the church, bending almost double to avoid the shots which flew past. In front, waving his sword, ran an officer. At their side, waving his red képi and shouting vigorously, pranced an elderly man in a general's uniform, mounted on a brown horse. As I looked, the front ranks halted for a second to fire, and at the same moment the officer in front of them flung up his arms and fell. A man sprang out of the front rank, and ran to him and caught him in his arms, held him so for a second, dropped him, and sped on in advance of the

rest, cheering them to the charge. He took the place of their fallen leader, and they swept like a hurricane round the north side of the church, and dived headlong into the smoke beyond. Apparently they carried all before them, for the German fire got further and further away; and as the grey smoke curled up we saw the howitzer, from which the shell had come, standing there forsaken, amid heaped piles of dead. The men in the tower shouted at the sight, and raced down the steps to join the pursuit. Those in the churchyard had already gone—all who could go. As soon as the effect of the charge was apparent, the man on the brown horse clapped on his képi, and bent and galloped off to another part of the field.

I heard groans below, and went down to see what help I could give.

The shell had done the mischief. It had made a hole in the side of the church, and the splinters had brought down about a dozen men. About a dozen others lay under the outer wall. I found later on that they were all dead, every one shot through the head as he stood up to fire.

I laid hands on the first groaning man I came to. His head was torn open, disclosing the brain, a sickening sight. I could do nothing for him but prop him gently against the side of the church. The next man's shoulder was badly torn; the arm would have to come off. I bound it up temporarily with a piece of another man's coat, and dragged him with scraping heels inside the church. And so, from one to another, till I had done all the little I could for them. I found a bucket of water in the church, and gave them drinks all round. Then it seemed to me that I might think of myself. I turned my back on the church, and struck out for Paris.

A single body lay in my course; it was the officer I had seen fall as he led on his men. He was lying on his face, and I stopped dead at sight of his back; it was riddled with shots, all from behind—a very terrible sight.

Something moved me to turn him decently face upwards, to hide the infamy of those shots.

It was Raoul de Querhoal. I dropped him, and hurried on to where I saw figures flitting to and fro with stretchers. Several ambulance waggons were making slowly towards the city. It took me a good quarter of an hour to reach an ambulance that was still only loading. I went up to a tall, thin man, in a black frock-coat and brown wide-awake hat, who stood by, apparently directing operations. He had a pleasant, clean-shaven face, and he was smoking a large and evidently excellent cigar, both of which things were attractive.

"There are twelve wounded in the church over there, Monsieur," I said, as I saluted him.

"I thank you," he said, in peculiarly bad French, and then shouted in English, "Now then, boys, hurry up there. There's a dozen more in the church over yonder. We'll have to take another waggon."

"Are they very bad?" he asked me, in his villainous French.

"Some of them are," I replied in English. "Shell splinters mostly."

"Hello! What are you?" he asked. "Not one of our men, I think?"

"No, I'm surgeon attached to Frossard's corps; escaped from Metz ten days ago, came through German lines this morning, want to get into Paris."

"Gad!" he said. "That's a novelty, anyhow. Tendency here is mostly the other way. Why?" Then: "Damn it, Frank; handle 'em gently, my boy. You nearly bumped that man's head off against the door."

Frank was looking rather sick. He was a slim young fellow, and the man he was lifting by the shoulders had a pulped head, like the one in the churchyard.

"Why?" said the other, as he turned to me again.

"My fiancée is inside, and I have heard nothing of her for close on three months. I came out of Metz to come in here."

"Good enough," he said. "Can you carve—operate?"

"I helped carve the remains of Colombey and Mars-la-

Tour, and Gravelotte. Forty thousand dead and wounded," I said; "and I have my M.B. and B.S. degrees."

"My God, think of it!—the dead and wounded, I mean, not the degrees. You must have had your hands full."

"Too full; they died like flies."

"They haven't any too much grip. Say! You stick by me; I'll get you in. Phew!" he said suddenly, looking in the direction of my church. "I doubt if we'll be able to get them just yet. Here they come back again as fast as they went." And we saw the Frenchmen streaming back across the fields, halting now and again to fire into the smoke behind, and then coming on again with a rush.

"Clear out, boys!" he shouted. "We must come back later, when they've settled down a bit."

The ambulance moved off towards a big fort, whose heavy guns now began booming over our heads, and we followed.

"What did you say your name was?" he asked.

"Charles Glyn, London University and Bart's. I live at Dinan, in Brittany."

"Serving for fun, I suppose? Or are you regularly attached?"

"I wanted the experience, and went out as stretcher-bearer; but after the first day in Metz they promoted us to our proper rank as surgeons."

"Us?"

"I had a chum with me from Bart's. I left him behind in charge of a sick man at Dinan. He's coming in later."

"And how did you escape being made into potted spy by the Francs-tireurs and the Germans?"

I told him very briefly, and he laughed.

"You can generally work on a German if you take him on the sentimental side. Not always, but you seem to have struck a remarkably soft spot. Gad! They're giving us fits, aren't they? They may have soft hearts, but they've got uncommonly hard heads, and they're altogether a finer breed than we get round here."

"You're a surgeon?" I asked.

"Not a bit of it. I'm wheat in Chicago. Elrode Eason

Smartte—S-M-A-R-T-T-E, if you please, and don't you forget it! Smart E E, the boys call me, when I catch 'em short on three-months-ahead wheat, and smite 'em on the hip. I spend a good deal of my time over here, you see; and I happened in just when they were putting the shutters up, so I thought I'd stop and see it through. I helped, financially, to rig up this affair"—he nodded towards the ambulance in front—"so they let me potter about, and feel as if I was bossing the show; but only as regards picking 'em up. When I've turned my cargo over to the medicos, then my part's done, 'cept that now and again I can help smooth things a bit for the poor broken beggars. How long will it last, do you think?"

"It's hard to say. I imagine it depends on the people inside here."

"They're a set of congenital idiots," he said briskly. "All pulling different ways, and mostly with a keen eye to the main chance. There isn't ballast enough in the whole country to run a decent one-horse circus. Your old man, Lyons, has coiled up his tail and gone, by the way; and Russia and Austria have bolted. The Pope's old neuter gender is here still, I believe, but the only man with any grit in him is our old man Washburne. He's sticking like an old trump. I guess he and I'll walk the deck till the ship sinks."

We had halted under shelter of the fort while he rattled on, and were standing now watching the beaten troops stream past towards the city.

"Play's over for to-day," he said. "As soon as they clear a bit, we'll wander out and gather up the fragments that remain. They're little beasts, many of 'em, but I'm always sorry for them when they get broken. Ready, Frank? I think we can get along now. Those three vans all empty? Right! Go ahead, boy, and we'll romp 'em in in time for breakfast. You'll come, Mr. Glyn?"

"Certainly. I'm going to hang on to your coat tails, as tight as I know how, till I'm safe inside Paris."

"That's your line; and after too, I hope. We don't meet like this on the bloody field to part as soon as we get stamping asphalt once more. Nessy paw?"

"I hope not," I said. "I count myself very lucky to have met you."

"I'll be mighty glad to have a sensible man to talk to occasionally, more especially if he don't smell too strong of carbolic. I'm inclined to believe I'll smell hospital for the rest of my natural life. I've got a pretty strong stomach, as a rule," he said, as we tramped back towards the battlefield, "and I was with little Phil Sheridan in the Shenandoah, and at Cedar Creek and Five Forks, and I take my beefsteak rare; but somehow I never seem to get used to seeing brother man broken in bits. Now, if I had my way— Make straight for that little church first, Frank; the Dutchies won't touch us. If I had my way, I'd just have put this poor old Louis Nap—Badinguet we call him now—and old Father William—the mystic drunkard we call *him*, heaven only knows why, I never heard that he drank more'n was good for him—I'd just have put 'em inside a ring fence, and handed 'em in anything they wanted, and let 'em fight it out. Best man to take the belt, and the loser to pay the reckoning. God! man, just think what it would have saved in the way of human life and broken hearts. Forty thousand killed and wounded! I tell you what, Glyn, that's H-E-L-L!"

"What's this?" he asked, stopping at de Querhoal's body. "He seems to have had it pretty hot. All in the back, too."

"He was shot from behind by his own men," I said. "I saw it all from the church tower there."

"The devil! That's bad. Are these cusses we're going for the ones that did it?"

"No; the ones that did it went on and drove the Germans back, and captured a gun, and fought like men."

"Well, well! They're the damndest queerest people I ever had to do with, and that's a fact."

"I'd like to bury him, if it were possible," I said.

"Why? Know him?"

"Yes, I know him; and I doubt if he's got any worse than he deserved, though it doesn't sound nice to say so."

"Bad lot, was he?"

"A bad lot," I said, "and made much mischief in his time."

"The Germans will bury him all right," he said. "Let's go in and load up the vans."

So we went on to the church, leaving Raoul de Querhoal lying on his face, with the shameful story of his death written large all over his back.

CHAPTER XXI.

A HUMAN TONIC IN A WIDE-AWAKE.

THE man with the shattered head was sitting dead where I had placed him. The rest were mostly as I had left them, and we carried them quickly to the waggons. Outside, the German stretcher bearers and burial parties—the Krankenträger and Todten-gräber—were already busily at work, and before our cargo was complete a tall blue officer came striding along from group to group, notebook and pencil in hand, apparently taking tally of casualties. He came up to the church, and I saw it was Captain von Marcius. His face was stern and hard set.

"Hola, Mr. Glyn! We meet again. Have you seen anything of my little brother round here?" He spoke lightly, but I could perceive the great anxiety that was in him.

"No. Not hurt, is he?" I asked, with a pang of pain on the bright boy's account.

"Don't know; he hasn't answered the roll. Afraid he's down somewhere. No more in there, are there?"

"No; we've got them all." And he strode away.

Here there came a sudden shout from the tower.

"Say, Glyn, there's a wounded Dutchman up here. Shall we take him along?" And as I ran up the stair I heard:

"Here, you brown billy-cock! Don't you call me names. I'm a Pomeranian Prussian, and no more a Dutchman than you're a Frenchman. Just call my carriage, if you please; it's somewhere outside there—Private von Marcius's carriage."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Smartte.

"Call that carriage first, and you can go and be shot if you like. Got a match on you? My right arm's gone on strike."

I shouted with delight at sight of the boy sitting there among the spent cartridges, with his back to the wall, and a

pool of blood at his side, and one of his brother's big cigars in his mouth a good deal chewed. His face was very pale now, and the little white moustache made it look rather ghastly. His right arm hung limp, and he had evidently lost a good deal of blood. Smartte was holding a lighted match to the cigar as I burst in.

"Hello, Glyn. That you?" said Heinrich, with an effort at continued cheerfulness.

"Von Marcius," I shouted, through the openings under the eaves. "He's up here. Wounded, but lively." And the elder brother, with a face full of concern, was kneeling by him almost before I had ascertained that the upper bone of the right arm was badly shattered.

"It will have to come off," I whispered to the captain.

"Damn!" said Heinrich faintly. Then the cigar fell from his lips and sizzled in the pool of blood, and he lay limp and white.

Smartte, after looking at us all for a moment, had run down to call a German stretcher-party. I twisted my handkerchief tightly round the upper part of the arm to stop the waste as far as possible, and we carried him gently down the stairs.

"Get him attended to as quickly as possible," I said. "He'll be all right as soon as the arm is off and the flow stopped."

The captain pressed my hand, and Private von Marcius's carriage moved quickly away.

"Fine boys," said Smartte; "fine breed. Now we'll go home to breakfast; I'm beginning to feel empty."

The waggons were already moving slowly towards the city, and we followed in their wake. As we passed within the enceinte, among the vociferous crowds of sightseers, I felt, most gratefully, that matters had turned out infinitely better than they might have done, and that now, at last, I was really within arm's reach of my prize.

As we turned up the Boulevard de l'Hôpital our waggons were stopped for a moment by a stout, dark figure in priestly soutane and wide-brimmed hat, who glanced in at the

wounded men, and passed swiftly on towards the outside. His face was strenuously set, and I had an idea that I knew what he was looking for. I turned and looked after him, hesitating for a moment whether I should go and tell him. But he was out of sight in a moment among the throng.

"Know him?" asked Smartte.

"Yes. He is looking for the man we saw shot in the back."

"Well, he won't find him. I saw them burying him before we left." And we followed the waggons.

We deposited our cargo in a wing of the Salpétrière, and then my new friend insisted on my accompanying him to his rooms "in the next block" to get something to eat, a suggestion which my inner man received with acclamation, for the last few hours had been fairly wasteful.

He took my arm in friendly fashion, and led me up a street nearly opposite the hospital to a little hotel, the Lion d'Or, which lay between the Horse Market and the Jardin des Plantes. In the beaming smiles with which his return was greeted by Madame the proprietress, it was easy to read the principal guest of the house; and, indeed, in those dismal times he must have been a godsend to the little hostelry.

"Ah, Monsieur, who returns," smiled Madame's white teeth and black eyes. "Any good fortune this morning, Monsieur?"

"Nop! We did very well, but they were too many for us, Madame, as usual."

"Ah, the sacrés Prussiens! It is always the same. And Monsieur is famished; I can see it in his face."

"And I can feel it somewhere else. Send up everything you have in the house, my dear Madame; and if we are still hungry we will ask you to cook Lotte there for us,; as a smart, rosy-cheeked chambermaid came fluttering round.

"Ant—Say! Kuk me rare, n'est-ce pas, Monsieur?" giggled Lotte, with an obvious knowledge of the American's tastes, and a repetition of an often used formula.

"That's right! There's something in that pretty little

head of yours, after all, Lotte. You'll be as smart inside as you are out if you go on like this."

"Mais oui!" said Lotte, with much pride in her accomplishments. "I—am—smart. Zow—arst—smart. Ve—are—smart. N'est-ce pas?"

"Clever girl! Now, vite with the mangeables; and, say! Bring up two bottles of that best Burgundy; I've been drinking blood and smoke all the morning."

"Ah, mon dieu! What monster! Voyons, vite viz ze mangeables." And she hurried away on her duties.

"Now we'll wash off the stains of battle. I always like to eat clean. Come right in here, Glyn, and make yourself at home. There's water, soap. Here's a clean towel. That's my old mother, way down in Illinois. No, I'm not married, or I probably wouldn't be here. The girl I was to have married died while I was fighting down South, and I've never cared to pick up with anyone else. Funny little crib this, isn't it? But I enjoy it immensely. I discovered it three years ago, and I've come back each time since. They lay themselves out to do their very best for me, and their cookery licks the Grand into little fits."

A peremptory tap on the door, and Lotte's voice announcing that Monsieur was served, brought us promptly to table. We had a most excellent breakfast, seasoned with many lively passages of arms between my host and our saucy attendant; and when she had left us with the coffee and cognac, and Smartte lay back in his chair watching the blue smoke curl up from two of his big cigars, he said:

"I know you're wanting to get along after the young lady, Glyn. Do you know where to find her?"

I pulled out my papers, and found the telegram which had summoned Marie to Paris, and handed it to him.

"Rue Duvernois 23. Whereabouts is that? Do you know?"

"Haven't an idea. I'll have to inquire."

"We'll ask downstairs. Then, if you don't mind, we'll just run over to the hospital for a minute, to see how the boys we brought in to-day are getting along, and then I'll

go along with you. I'm keen to see the end of this story, if you don't mind."

I assured him that not only did I not mind, but that, on the contrary, I would be very glad of his company, as my own knowledge of the geography of Paris was limited.

"I know my way about," he said, "but I don't think I was ever in the Rue Duvernois. Madame or Lotte may know."

Madame and Lotte both knew the Rue Duvernois. Madame said it was down Grenelle way, while Lotte asserted that it was in La Vilette, both of which districts are at exactly opposite sides of the city. So we went over to the hospital and inspected our morning's salvage, and Smartte made a brisk tour of the older residents, with a word of cheer and encouragement for every one of them, delivered in the heartiest of tones and the most broken French I ever heard. They were all delighted to see him, and brightened up as soon as he came near them; and for nearly every one he had some small remembrance—for the most convalescent cigarettes, and for the others sweetmeats and chocolates, which were eagerly welcomed.

"They're just like a lot of children," he said, "and it does me good to make 'em smile and forget their breakages for a minute or two. They're very grateful for very little."

He chatted with the doctors and assistants about some of the cases, and everywhere his coming was welcomed with a smile. It was good to see him; and his own enjoyment in his simple ministry was evident, and very delightful.

Then we chartered a fiacre, and told the driver to take us to Rue Duvernois 23; and he drove us along the Quais, and over the river by the Pont St. Michel, and along the Rue de Rivoli—where the shops were open, but there seemed very few people about—past the Tuileries Gardens—which were full of soldiers under canvas, and mighty odd they looked there, as Smartte did not fail to remark—and up the Rue Royale, past the Madeleine, and so to the neighbourhood of St. Lazare.

"They were pretty bad shots both of 'em," said my

friend; "but little Lotte came nearer bull's eye than Madame. She hit the right side of the river, anyhow, which is, perhaps, as much as you could expect from a woman."

My heart beat high as our carriage drew up before a tall, dark house, in spite of its aspect, which was distinctly forbidding. It frowned upon us before ever we touched the knocker.

"Sure this is 23 Duvernois?" said Smartte to the driver.

"But yes, M'sieur; assuredly this is Rue Duvernois 23. There is no other."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure, M'sieur; unless it has been named since the cursed Prussians came," said the driver with a grin.

"Well, you'd better wait." And we attacked the gloomy mansion.

It seemed, at first, as if there was no one inside; but, by dint of continued knocking, the door opened grudgingly at last, and an old woman appeared in the cavernous hallway, and looked angrily out at us.

"Well, what's the matter now?" she asked in a surly voice.

"Is Mademoiselle de Kerhuel stopping here, Madame?" I asked.

"There is no one here but me."

"Can you tell me where she has gone to?"

"I know nothing about her."

"But she was stopping here with her brother, who was wounded."

But she shook her head and said, "No, there has been no one stopping here."

Smartte, with a national belief in the power of the almighty dollar, pulled out a five-franc piece and handed it to her.

"Come, old lady," he said, "just tell us all you can, and perhaps there may be more cart-wheels for you."

She pocketed the money and said, "But I have already told Messieurs all there is to tell. There is no one here. There has been no one here. Que voulez-vous?"

"This is Rue Duvernois 23, is it not?"

"But yes."

"M. Taillou?"

"Si, si."

"And you have not had a wounded soldier here, and his sister nursing him?"

"I have already told Monsieur so."

We looked at one another nonplussed; and the old woman regarded us discouragingly.

We went down the steps and stood on the pavement, in doubt what to do next.

"Well, jehu. What would you do?" said Smartte to the driver, who had been listening to the colloquy.

"For me, I should go to the police," said he, in a matter-of-fact tone of absolute reliance on the higher powers.

"Go to the devil," said the old lady up above.

"She is lying; I can see it in her eyes," said *cocher* with a grin.

"We will go to the police," said Smartte. And we got into the carriage again, and drove away; leaving the old woman shaking her fist at us.

This was very disconcerting. A search for Marie in Paris would be much like searching for the proverbial needle in the haystack.

I was in the near side back seat of the carriage, and consequently had my back to the pavement when I turned to Smartte. I was just saying, "Now, I wonder what the deuce is the meaning of all that?" when suddenly he laid his hand on my arm, and said quietly to the driver, "Turn and walk back, but don't pass the house." And to me, "Isn't that your black-coated friend of this morning?"

I sprang to my feet, and looked over the driver's seat. M. le Curé was walking rapidly along the street, and we both stood up and watched him. He passed up the steps of No. 23, knocked, and was instantly admitted.

"Turn, cocher, and drive to the nearest police-station," said Smartte. "It's no good getting out, Glyn; you can do nothing there,' as I was going to jump down.

"Ah-ha! The black crow," chuckled the driver. "For me, I do not like those gentlemen of the long robe either. But no, name of a dog! Not the least little bit."

We were politely received by the Commissary of Police. He heard our story, examined the telegram, and stated that his appointment was of such recent date that he had no personal knowledge of anything that transpired in the district fourteen days ago. He ventured the opinion that No. 23, Rue Duvernois was probably no better than it should be; but as yet he was only beginning to learn his district, and promised to make inquiries.

Smartte asked him to communicate with us at the Lion d'Or, and, as we went down the steps to the fiacre, said emphatically,

"That's no good; he's not cut his eye-teeth yet. You see, they had to rig up a new system when we revolutionised about a month ago, and the new brooms are a bit afraid of tackling the mud heaps. We'll try a private agency; they'll find out all there is to know about 23 Duvernois inside twenty-four hours."

But I was too much troubled in my mind at thought of the connection of the Jesuit with the house where I expected to find Marie, and where all knowledge of her was denied, to wait quietly doing nothing while the detectives nosed the matter out.

"I must go back to that house," I said.

"Right! We'll go, but you'll get nothing out of that old witch," he said good-naturedly. "I know the kind of old lady she is. Back to 23, Duvernois, cocher!"

"Voyons!" And *cocher* whipped up his steed, and thanked his stars for so profitable a job.

We hammered on the big door again; but either the old woman had seen us coming or suspected who it was, for we got nothing for our pains. A few of the neighbours collected, and encouraged us to further exertions with remarks of a humorous character.

"Monsieur makes much more noise than the forts," said

one, with the air of a connoisseur. "It is almost as good as a mitrailleuse in the street."

"If Monsieur would go and hammer the Prussians that way, now!" suggested another.

"That house is closed for repairs, Messieurs," said a third. "It was in a truly shocking condition inside; Prussians, I believe."

"Monsieur will find much better accommodation elsewhere. Try the Tuileries, par exemple." And so on, till, at last, since we could not force an entrance, we got into the carriage and drove away—for myself, in a furious tumult of feeling.

Smartte gave the driver an address in the Rue Vivienne.

"I know a man there who will find out if the young lady has ever been there," he said. "A mighty smart fellow. A man in Buffalo swindled me out of 200,000 dollars, and slipped over here. I got wind of it, and followed him by the next boat. It wasn't so much the money, but I didn't like that a man like that should think he could do me just in that way. I set this man Svolski to find him, and three days later I slipped into the chair next my man at breakfast at his hotel, and said, 'Young man, I'll just trouble you for that 200,000 dollars, plus five hundred more that it's cost me to find you, and we'll call it square.' And he was the most surprised man ever I set eyes on. He turned whiter'n the table-cloth, and slipped his hand round to his hip. But I said, 'Look here, sonny, I'm not going to have you making any mess, and spoiling folk's breakfasts. If it's my brains you want to investigate, they're mine, same as the money you've got upstairs; and if it's your own, it's waste of time, for you ain't got any worth speaking of. Just you take it quiet, and finish your breakfast, and then we'll go up to your room and talk it over.' But, somehow, he didn't seem to have much appetite; and I had to do all the eating, and the talking too; but he shelled out upstairs, and I let him go. Svolski's a Pole, and as sharp as they make 'em. I call him 'Points,' because he's all abristle with 'em. He'll find your young lady for us. At all events, he'll find out all there

is to find out about 23 Duvernois, which may give us something to work on."

M. Svolski was at home, and received us with *empressement*. Business was slack, and the prospect of it was pleasing.

He was the typical French detective. Sharpness and blackness were his chief characteristics. His eyes were black, and as sharp as needles. His moustache was black, and waxed out to pin points. His beard was black and pointed. His voice was sharp and piercing.

I gave him the points of the story, and he picked them up like a magnet.

"I say nothing," he said. "In two days I will tell you all I have learned. The times are somewhat awkward for investigations—the old machinery is thrown aside, and the new is not yet in working order; but everything that can be done I will do, Messieurs. Count upon me. In two days I will call upon you at——?"

"Lion d'Or, near the Horse Market," said Smartte.

"I know it. Is la petite demoiselle Lotte still there? Yes? Ah, a truly smart girl that. Do not say I asked after her, Messieurs; it would only recall sad memories to her, and nature intended her to be gay."

"Why, how did you meet Lotte?" asked Smartte with interest.

"I can trust Monsieur not to speak of it. It was in the Belleville case—the old miser who was found cut up in sections in a trunk. Ma'm'selle was his housekeeper, and the pig-headed ones arrested her for the crime. It needed me to set them right and Ma'm'selle free. She had nothing whatever to do with it, or with those who did it. She is a good girl, and very cheerful. I would have made her Madame Svolski, but—there were obstacles in the way."

"Not objections on Mdlle. Lotte's part, surely?" smiled Smartte in his good-humoured way.

"N—o," said Svolski, with a gleaming black and white smile. "To tell the truth, there was already a Madame Svolski, and the too strict laws of France forbade it; and Ma'm'selle's own good sense would not permit a morganatic

alliance. I have royal blood, oh, yes, though it is some time back. Perhaps I shall try again, now I am free."

"Not till the siege is over, I hope," said Smartte.

"No; I think I will wait till the siege is over. Enfin, it won't be long."

"Perhaps, for Lotte's sake, it would be as well if you did not come to the Lion d'Or," suggested Smartte.

"Oh, not at all, Monsieur. To hear that old affair spoken of by anyone else would trouble her; but the sight of me will make her happy. Till the day after to-morrow, then, Messieurs. Adieu and au revoir." And he bowed us out most royally.

"We can count on Svolski," said Smartte, as we drove home; "and I'm going to see this thing through. You're going to stop with me till we find Ma'm'selle, Glyn. Now, don't, my dear boy," as I opened my mouth to object. "It's a godsend to me to have you to talk to, and to be of some use to. You see, I've absolutely no tastes. I don't paint, or write, or read, or fish, or shoot, or anything of that kind. I've done nothing all my life except make money and spend it; and when I've spent all I can making myself comfortable I get heaps more fun spending it on making other folks comfortable than any other thing I've ever struck."

It was as impossible as it would have been ill-mannered to resist him, and so I fell in with his humour.

"If every rich man thought as you do, the world would be a very much pleasanter place for the rest," I said.

"Oh, I don't know; the world's much as people make it for themselves, I think, but most of 'em are fools. That's where the trouble is."

CHAPTER XXII.

A LOST SHELL.

I WOULD not dare to say that Elrode Smartte enjoyed the siege. There was in it the possibility—though not, perhaps, up to that time the actuality—of such dreadful suffering for those who had least to do with it, and nothing at all to gain by it, that it would be a libel on a very fine nature to say that he enjoyed it.

But that he enjoyed to the very utmost the new interest it brought into his life, and the innumerable opportunities it afforded of smoothing the ways for those who could not help themselves, was undoubted.

To the broken men in hospital he was a special Providence, with an ever-smiling face, an ever-open hand, and a cheery word of hope at all times. Sallow-faced Linesmen, fresh-faced Mobiles and Marines, grizzly Zouaves, and thick-lipped Turcos, whatever their complexions or conditions, they all broke into welcoming smiles at sight of him. Profuse as were their spoken thanks, and nothing on earth is more grateful for kindness than a wounded Frenchman, his richest harvest was in the thanks that were never put into words, but which glowed in the long, prostrate rows of eyes and faces as soon as his voice was heard in the ward.

Of skill or understanding of their hurts he had none; but of that infinitely greater knowledge which taught him how to cheer their hearts he knew much. And when they felt themselves slipping away—and very many died, in spite of the most careful nursing—it was to the cheery foreigner, with his uncouth words of hope and comfort, that they turned, rather than to the cut and dried, black and white, stereotyped consolations of the priest or the nursing sister. How many rough hands he held in his big, cool ones, as the feeble grip slackened, and the fevered pulses slowed and died, and left the hard fingers colder than his own, it would be impossible to say.

"Seems to me," he said in his quiet, grim way one day, "I'm parson-undertaker to this section. I believe some of 'em hang on a bit longer than they would do in the ordinary course of things just 'cause they want me to be by 'em and give 'em the last good-bye. It's natural, too. I know, if it was me, I'd sooner have a friend by me at the last minute than one of those blue-jowled gentlemen in black or any of those women in black and white. Mind you, I'm not saying a word against them. I've no doubt they're as good as anything outside heaven can be; but they don't show their best stock in the windows, and they're not sympathetic. The boys feel I'm a plain man, just like themselves, and I've fought and been wounded just like themselves, and I understand 'em—at least, partly. And they like it."

I knew he had some formula which he administered to the dying, and I have seen the faces of case-hardened, elderly troopers soften strangely under his whispered words as the sands ran out. I often wondered what he said to them; but he and they liked to be alone at the last, and, as a rule, they got their way, in spite of priest or sister.

I was sitting by the side of a young sailor from Plougastel one afternoon. He had been hit by a shell while serving his gun in Bicêtre. He was so typically Breton that I had taken a great fancy to him. We had had more than one cheerful chat about Brittany, and Brest, and the great strawberry grounds; and he had longingly declared that if he could get back there all would be well with him. But that was impossible; and he was going another way, and he knew it.

Smartte happened to pass the bed, and after one glance came and sat down by it, saying to me, "He's going." And then I heard his simple formula. It was rendered in his own peculiar French, but no one could mistake its practical simplicity

"Mon gars," he said gently, taking the brown, hairy hand in his, "le bon Dieu est très bon, et il pense ce moment à vous. Il est comme votre père et votre mère. Pensez à lui, mon cher, et il vous recevra chez lui. Il a besoin de vous."

"De moi?" murmured the dying boy.

"Mais oui, je vous l'assure."

"Mon dieu! Bon dieu!" And another soul slipped its moorings and was gone, and gone comforted.

It was very simple. To me, who had always been terribly tongue-tied in such matters, it was very beautiful.

Meanwhile my own heart was greatly troubled about Marie.

In the evening of the second day, just in time for dinner, which had probably not escaped his forethought, M. Svolski appeared at the Lion d'Or, and was announced by Lotte with a somewhat heightened colour and a slightly conscious manner. Smartte begged him to join us at table, and "Points" made no pretence of hesitation. A good dinner was, he frankly stated, a thing not to be despised in these times; and he displayed the most excellent appetite of the three.

He gave us his news at once, and it was not of a nature to raise my spirits.

"I routed out, with some difficulty," he said, "the several agents de police who used to have that beat, and one of them informed me that about fourteen days ago—he could not be certain to a day or two—a young lady with an old attendant came to the house, Rue Duvernois, No. 23, with luggage. The house does not bear a good reputation. Taillou is a returned convict; the old woman is his mother. Enfin, you understand they are a bad lot, and would lend themselves to anything. The young lady and the bonne, however, were not there more than a few hours. A gentleman came and took them away in a hired carriage——"

"What kind of a gentleman? Could he say?" I asked in much anxiety.

"An officer of dragoons—a captain."

"A captain of dragoons!" And my heart kicked furiously within me. "Is he quite certain of that?"

"Quite certain, Monsieur."

"Did he know him?"

"He did not, Monsieur."

"Did he know if there was any sick man being nursed at No. 23?"

"He is quite sure there was nothing of the kind. In the first place, it is the last place any sick man would go to to be nursed; and, in the next, it could not have happened without the knowledge of himself or his colleagues, and he heard no word of any such thing."

"And the priest?"

"The priest is from the country, and came to the house some days after Ma'm'selle left it. He has rooms there apparently, but is much abroad."

"There is some damnable rascality at the bottom of all this," I said hotly. And under the pressure of my excitement and fears I told them the whole story of the Kerhuels and Querhoals, down to the last episode of the fire at the Château, and the strange home-coming of M. de Kerhuel.

Smartte was intensely interested. "Why, it's a regular three-decker novel," he said. "At least, it will be by the time we're through with it. Don't you go into the dumps, Glyn. We'll find Miss Marie, and turn the whole matter inside out, including the gentleman in the long coat, if it costs us a hundred thousand dollars."

"The priest is at the bottom of it all, I should say," said Svolski thoughtfully. "Though why they should keep the father locked up all these years is beyond me. There may be deeper reasons than any we know of. On the face of it, I should say the telegram which brought Ma'm'selle to Paris was simply a trap. Probably the captain induced her to go to some other address in the belief that her brother had been removed there."

"But why entrap her so? He could not make her marry him."

At that he shrugged his shoulders significantly. "It has been done," he said. "I had a similar case a couple of years ago. The young lady was compromised in much the same way. To save her reputation she married the man. She poisoned him six months later. But you say this M. de Querhoal is dead, Monsieur?"

"Yes; I saw him shot in the last sortie."

"Then, at the very worst, Ma'm'selle is quit of him now; and the only question is—Where is she? Ordinarily that would present no very great difficulty; but now, voyez-vous, and thanks to the Revolution, the machinery is all in pieces, and there has been a lapse in the surveillance."

"The priest may know," suggested Smartte.

"I will have him watched," said Svolski.

At the very worst! How my heart was tortured by the thought of what my dear girl might have suffered! If I had come across M. le Curé at that time, I would have taken him by the throat in the street, and endeavoured to wrest the truth from him. But it was some time before I saw him again, and then my hands were tied.

Svolski reported next day that the priest, apprised evidently of the inquiries that were on foot, had quitted No. 23, Rue Duvernois, and he was now endeavouring to get on his track again.

The days ran on, however, and brought us no news Ceaseless outpost encounters kept us busy, and our beds and hands full; and in all my friend's labours I was permitted to share, and was grateful for the privilege. Cheerier or kinder comrade no man ever had. He was probably twice my age in actual years, but in companionableness and the keen interest he took in all my affairs no brother could have surpassed, and few would have equalled, him.

"We'll find her for you in time, old man," was his constant word. He had very soon kicked on patronymics, called me by my first name, or sonny, or old man, or anything of the kind that came first, and insisted on me addressing him as "Rode." "Sounds homely, and 'minds me of the old lady in Illinois," he said. "We'll find her all right, if she's anywhere in this muddled old village; and then you shall marry her off-hand, and all will be hunk-a-dory."

But the days passed, and I seemed no nearer to my heart's desire than on the day I walked in behind the ambulance from Choisy.

Just as the missing sailor's wife haunts the seashore, so

I spent much time wandering aimlessly about the streets, fully aware of the utter futility of it, yet hoping always that Providence might reach out the long arm, and bring us together. The wide-rolling sea has swallowed the sailor, and the heart-broken woman watches the tumbling waves, if perchance they may roll his dead body to her feet. Paris had swallowed my sweetheart, and I moved among its slow currents with the wild hope in my heart that the moment might come when my eyes would light on the beloved face, and with a shout I would clasp her in my arms again.

The people were very quiet and subdued at this time. For a while, after the fall of the Empire, Smartte told me, they were inclined to be boisterous and rowdy. But the installation of a people's Government had satisfied them for the moment, and there were days and nights when I could more easily have fancied myself wandering in the City of London on a Sunday than in Paris on a weekday—except, indeed, for the dull booming of the forts outside, which at times, when the wind blew our way, sounded startlingly close.

The idea occurred to me that it was possible that M. Renel had mentioned his friend M. Dellieu to Marie before she left. Perhaps, even, he had given her a letter to him, as he had done to us. So I hopefully made my way to the Rue S. Dominique, and was so fortunate as to find M. Dellieu at home.

The worthy pastor was keenly interested in all our doings since he parted from us at the Gare de Strasbourg the day we set out for Metz. He inquired at once for Myrtle, and I told him he had promised to follow me in, and that we were to meet at his house, though whether he would manage it was doubtful, as my own successful entry had been due simply to a series of lucky chances. I told him, too, of Marie's being in Paris, and asked anxiously if he knew anything about her. But, beyond her name, he knew nothing, and was greatly distressed at my story.

"I do not see that we can do anything more than you are doing, M. Glyn," he said thoughtfully. "A good de-

tective and Providence are the only hopes, and those you seem to have provided yourself with. Those Jesuits—! They stick at nothing. They have been proscribed and proscribed; but you cannot stamp out a creed by law, and their craving for power is the mainspring of their creed."

He told me he had very little faith in the men at the head of affairs accomplishing anything substantial in the way of stopping the *debacle*.

"Gambetta, Rochefort, Louis Blanc!" he said with a shrug. "They talk much, but words won't alter facts. As for M. Trochu"—he smiled a dry smile—"I also am from Brittany. He is honest, but he will never beat the Prussians. No, we are soundly beaten, and more with the rods of our own making than by the enemy. The chastisement of our sins is upon us. May it do us good!"

And in reply to my query as to how long he thought the siege would last, he said, "Just as long as the provisions last, I should imagine. When their stomachs collapse I doubt if there'll be much courage left. I am bound to say I have been surprised at their equanimity so far. We have had no risings—no trouble. But, of course, up to now it is the middle class only who suffer, and they chiefly in their pockets. The lower classes are rationed and fed, and are quite happy. Something to eat, if not all they would like, and nothing to do—they want nothing more at present."

We fared extremely well at the Lion d'Or, and so far had personally suffered not at all from the state of siege. What our faring cost it was not, under the circumstances, my place to inquire; and so far nothing very abnormal had appeared on our table. Once or twice, indeed, Smartte submitted Lotte to inquisition as to the composition of some dish or other; but that frivolous young lady's invariable reply, with a snap of the sparkling eyes, was, "Eat in confidence, Monsieur, eat in confidence. The Lion d'Or will never poison so good a guest as M. Smartte."

"Well, tell us when it's cat or rat, Lotte; that's all I ask. I don't mind trying 'em, but I'd like to know when I *am* trying 'em. I'm sure we've had horse. I nearly jumped

off the sidewalk the other day, because a horse neighed in my ear; and I find myself looking at dogs and cats with quite a new set of feelings, and I'm bound to say they seem to reciprocate them."

Twice a day at least, and oftener when a new batch of wounded had come in, we were over at the hospital; and we never went without our pockets full of remembrances for "the boys," and never brought a thing back with us. Chocolates and cigarettes were in greatest demand, and an unfailing comfort to them. Smartte's custom in those days must have gone far towards keeping the shops he patronised on their legs.

So the days passed, and no news came, and my heart was wrung and twisted with its fears.

And then came trouble and loss; which, nevertheless, in fulness of time worked out, as they have a way of doing, into great gain.

One night we were privately apprised that the ambulances would be required on the morrow. We were to be outside the Luxembourg at 5 a.m. No indication was given as to our later destination.

"Another sortie," said Smartte. "March out so many, bring back so many, and we and the others pick up the rest. So many Frenchmen bowled out, so many Germans bowled out, and—as you were! And no one a bit the better off."

"Except the fellows who come into our hands," I suggested.

"Some of them," he corrected.

Five o'clock found us shivering outside the iron railings of the Luxembourg Gardens in a damp, white fog. There was a considerable muster of troops there already; and presently the order was given to march, and we went off along the Rue d'Enfer, which Smartte remarked was the most appropriate route that could have been chosen.

Where the roads from Chatillon and Orléans meet at a point our force divided. We were told to follow the Chatillon detachment. Outside the walls still larger bodies of troops joined us, and the forts set up a thunderous roar, as

they always did when a sortie was attempted. Leopold von Marcius had assured me that whenever the Paris forts were unusually noisy in any one direction they, outside, immediately began massing troops along that front. And though it might take time to make their thin, extended line strong enough at any one point to withstand the wedge that came against it, they were always able to do so sooner or later, because of the forewarning of the forts.

We had tramped slowly along for half an hour or so after passing the enceinte, with the forts bellowing angrily on each side—Montrouge and Vanves, Smartte said they were—when of a sudden they fell silent, and in their place we heard sharp, rolling volleys of musketry to right and left. Then our own field artillery began to speak, and then the fighting men went forward, and we edged up foot by foot to see, if we might, what was going on.

The sun had come palely through the fog, and gave promise of a fine, bright day. In front we made out a village of considerable size, which seemed to be the centre of the hottest fighting. It was wreathed in soft, woolly, white smoke, shot down below with venomous yellow-white spits of fire, while the tumult that rose out of it was one loud, angry roar of men in deadly conflict—shots, and shouts, and yells.

"Rue d'Enfer was right," said Smartte; "and some of 'em have got there, and are getting it hot. They're at close grips. Wonder who's on top?"

That presently became evident. There came a loud burst of cheering on the left of the village. The tumult waxed louder than ever in the village itself, and then rolled away beyond it. The Germans had fallen back. The French artillery, which had ceased firing while the hand-to-hand fight was going on, dashed forward, a regiment of Mobiles came up at the double behind us, and we went forward to pick up the wounded.

The streets were full of French dead. The houses were shattered by shot, and ragged and broken by the strenuous entry of the sappers. The reserves were already throwing

up rough barricades in the streets against the expected return of the enemy. In their haste they were flinging the dead and wounded into heaps to clear the ground, and we found wounded men half suffocated by the piled-up bodies on top of them. Every window of every house in the main street we were in was shivered, frames and all, and when I entered one house I found it full of Bavarian Linesmen, all dead, with their tufted helmets dented and battered, as though the fury of the incomers had vented itself even upon them. The house was a shambles; I was glad to get back into the street.

We carried our wounded through the sweating barricade builders, filled van after van, and sent them off home. We were loading the last, when the bugles pealed an urgent summons round us. We heard the field guns crashing on the further side of the village, and shells came whizzing along the street, ricochetting from the houses, thudding in among the piles of dead and crowds of living, and blasting life into shapeless heaps and fragments of death.

"Charles, my son, this is H-E-L-L!" said Smartte, in his usual expressive fashion. "Let's get out of it. Damnation!" as a shell rolled under our last waggon, and lay there hissing and spitting like a venomous imp.

He did not hesitate one second. He ran forward, seized the vicious thing, carried it half a dozen steps, while my heart stood still and the blood foamed in my head. Then he hurled it away, and as it left his hand it burst, and he sank in a heap. I ran to him, with a sob in my mouth and cold fear at my heart. He lay quite still. I could not hope to find life in him; and why he was not dead I do not know to this day, except, indeed, that shells are unaccountable playthings at best, and charged with surprises. In France they are esteemed of the feminine gender.

But he was not dead, though very badly shattered; and my heart groaned for him. As far as I could see, his right arm was gone, the whole of his right side from crown to heel was more or less damaged, and his right leg badly hurt.

There is something peculiarly ghastly in a broken man,

when the break is absolute and new and raw, when the man appears suddenly before one minus a part that we look upon as essentially part of himself. I had seen many wounded men, and had become to an extent case-hardened; but the sight of my friend lying there with the fragments of his upper arm protruding from a fringe of ragged sleeve turned me suddenly sick.

The driver of the ambulance was killed, the nearest horse was down. Twice it struggled frantically to rise, then its head banged heavily on the ground, and it lay still. The other horse was badly gashed on the back and flanks with flying splinters, and the ambulance itself was riddled as though a volley had been fired into it.

But, sick or not sick, there was no time to lose. The village was boiling hell again, and I knew the broth would come out this side this time. I twisted my handkerchief round the stump of his right arm, and screwed it tight. There were men already hurrying past me towards the city. I called to one of them. He hesitated, and came. We lifted the broken body, and carried it to the ambulance, and got it in. I thanked the man, and he hurried off. I cut the reins and traces of the dead horse, backed the van off its legs and slewed it round, and started slowly along the road we had come, leading the horse by the head to encourage him, because he was shaking so badly. There were no more shells. They were fighting at the barricades in the village. A few high-aimed bullets came along, and I bent round to the left, and presently we were out of range.

We made but slow progress with only one horse, and that one wounded, and I stopped and went to look in at my cargo to see if perchance the load could be lightened. The two men on the left, the side where the shell had burst, were dead. I drew them out, and laid them by the roadside, whereupon we made better weather of it. Fresh troops passed us, hurrying to the front. Away to the left, as we drew near the fortifications, I caught a glimpse of dense black clouds of smoke rolling up into the blue sky. Afterwards I knew that it was St. Cloud burning.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONE THING THEY DID BETTER IN AMERICA.

I LED my waggon slowly in by the road we had come out that morning, through the crowds of expectant waiters of the event.

Many voices cried to me for news of the battle. I replied that we had driven them out of Chatillon, but they were coming on again when I left; and they gave my news a rousing cheer, and shook hands with one another. They saw the state of my horse, and half a dozen blue blouses volunteered help which I very gladly accepted.

"Where to, Monsieur?"

"Salpétrière." And they set their hands behind the van, and bent their heads and pushed, like good souls and better bodies. We turned down the Boulevard St. Jacques, then into the Boulevard de l'Hôpital; and so I brought my friend home.

A couple of infirmiers came out to assist.

"It is M. Smartte himself, Jules, and in bad case. Beg Dr. Morin to come out to me for a moment."

"Oh, mon dieu, mon dieu!" said Jules, and ran quickly.

Dr. Morin, our head surgeon, was by my side in a moment, in shirt sleeves, with rosy fingers from which the red water still dripped, and a face of very great concern.

"Serious, M. Glyn?"

"Very serious, I fear, Doctor. He picked up a shell that rolled under the waggon, and it burst as he flung it."

"Oh, mon dieu! Very gently, boys. Have care! Have care!" to the men who were lifting him out.

"Can you give him a private room?"

"But certainly. Take him to my bed, Jules. Philippe, bid Doctors Celle and Devaux attend me there instantly. The others must wait. We cannot lose M. Smartte.".

He ran into the ward he had quitted, to get some neces-

saries, and was in his own room with the other doctors by the time we arrived there. We laid the shattered body on the bed, and all gathered round it while the doctors made a hasty examination. The exclamations of pity that broke from them, as one after another the injuries were revealed, bore eloquent witness to the severity of the wounds and the love they all bore him.

I followed their examination with close attention, for in those days of over-pressure many a limb had I seen sacrificed that might have been saved.

"Trim the arm at once, and stop that drain," said Morin to his assistants. "Your tourniquet has probably saved his life, M. Glyn. The head and face wounds are not dangerous —painful, though, and disfiguring; the side—a nasty rip and wasteful; the leg——" He pondered some time over the leg, with twisted face. "I'm afraid it must go too," he said at last. "Celle, the chloroform; he is coming to."

They administered the chloroform, and he went off again.

"M. le Docteur," I said, "that leg must be saved, if it is at all possible. Pray try resection."

At which he only shrugged his shoulders.

"It is too far gone," he said, after another careful survey.

But I detected, or thought I did, which came to the same thing, a tinge of doubt in his tone.

"We must save it," I urged. "With leg and arm gone, he would not care to live."

"But look at it yourself, Monsieur. How is it possible to reconstruct that?"

"M. le Docteur, you will pardon me, but sooner than sacrifice it I will try it myself."

"Comment donc! You! Have you ever done it?"

"Yes, in Metz, several times. But I would prefer getting the assistance of one of the surgeons from the American ambulance; they practise it there all the time."

He hesitated still. "I fear it is only waste of time; and there is, as you see, no time to waste."

"We owe it to him to try, at all events. I assure you it would be his wish."

"Eh bien, soit! But go quick, quick!" And I ran down the stairs, and jumped into a fiacre, and sped in hot haste to the American ambulance in the Champs Elysées.

I had no difficulty there in enlisting their sympathy and assistance. Smartte was well known and liked there, as everywhere. They put their best man at my disposal, and we returned to the Salpétrière as fast as I had come.

I had some slight acquaintance with Dr. Marion Ray from having seen him at the American hospital tents when I went there with Smartte. He questioned me fully, as we drove along, as to the nature and origin of our friend's injuries.

"It was a mighty plucky and a mighty foolish thing to do," he said, "and it was just Smartte all over. He's North and I'm South, but he's a white man all through, and I'd give my left hand to help him."

He scrutinised closely the work of the French surgeons, but had no fault to find with it.

"Nasty rips those in the head and face, I can see," he said; "but they've no doubt joined them better than I could have done. They're dabs at tinkering of that kind, but they haven't had the experience of shelled bones that we have. What's wrong with the side?"

"Splinter rips all down. Not serious, I think."

He was working at the leg all the time, deftly and tenderly. Dr. Celle had remained with the patient, and Morin came back to overlook, and learn what he could from the resection.

"It will do," said Ray. "It's bad enough, but I've had worse, and seen them through all right."

Dr. Morin, with true French courtesy, expressed his admiration at the operation. "You gentlemen from America," he said, "beat us here. It is beautiful, very beautiful, and very clever."

"We bought our experience in a dear school, M. le Docteur," said Ray. "We had as many years of it as you have had months, and I can tell you it braced us up to top-notch. There are thousands of legs padding about the

States to-day which under the old system would have been cut off as useless."

Dr. Morin observed closely, and asked many technical questions, and Ray gave him of the fulness of his knowledge, and evidently delighted in the giving.

"You won't mind my coming in regularly to see him?" he asked, as he straightened up at last.

"But no, assuredly, my dear sir. He will owe that leg entirely to you—and to M. Glyn, who insisted on saving it."

"Friend Smartte will live to thank us all," said Ray. "And now I must run, Doctor; we've got a heap of sick men up there, and they need a lot of looking after."

"Pray accept my own thanks for your kindness in coming," said Morin.

"Pray don't mention it. We all like Smartte much too well to lose a bit more of him than is necessary," said Ray, and shook hands all round and rushed away.

"What men of business they are, those Americans," said Dr. Morin. "If our men in high places had been more like that, we should not be where we are now. Non, pardie!"

When my friend's left eye opened, slowly and with apparent reluctance, a little later, it rested vaguely on me for a moment. The right side of his face was swathed in bandages. He tried to move himself, and seemed much annoyed that he could not do so.

"Damn!" he said feebly; and closed his eye and lay still again.

"Is that you, Charlie?" he whispered presently, with a puzzled frown. "Or is it nightmare? What's happened?"

"You had a bad wrestle with a shell, Rode, and the shell came out top."

He pondered this for a minute, and then said, "I remember; it was under our waggon. Any of the boys hurt?"

"It killed two of them, and Antoine the driver, and one of the horses."

"Sorry!" he said quaintly, as if the fault were his.

Then he tried to move his head, so as to see his right arm.

"Arm's numb," he whispered. "Is it damaged?"

"Rode, dear friend, it's gone. The shell smashed it all to pieces."

"Damn!" he whispered quietly; and lay still, thinking it over.

He was weak with loss of blood, and presently he dozed off, and I left an infirmier in charge of him while I ran across to the hotel to get something to eat.

Madame and Lotte were, in their way, almost as much cut up at Smartte's disaster as he was himself. They both instantly proposed going over to nurse him; in which case, I presume, the hotel would have looked after itself.

I promised they should help if the need arose, but assured them he was better, at present, in the hands of the men accustomed to cases of the kind. "And everyone there likes him so much that you may be sure he won't be neglected."

"I'm sure of it," said Madame; "but, all the same, Monsieur——"

However, I prevailed on her to give me my breakfast, and promised Lotte the privilege of carrying some special soup across to him, if Madame would have it got ready; and she went down to the kitchen at once, to prepare it with her own hands.

Lotte's pretty face went very white when she saw him lying there, fragmentary, and tied together with cotton bandages. She very nearly screamed and almost let the soup fall. He had not moved since I left, the infirmier said, but he opened his one eye while we stood there looking at him.

He looked at Lotte and the soup, and then winked feebly and whispered:

"Soup, Lotte? Just ready for it."

"Oh, my poor, poor Monsieur Smartte!" cried Lotte, with her eyes full of tears. "Madame made it herself, and she will continue to make it, and everything else of the best, for Monsieur; and I shall bring it across."

"What's it made of?" he whispered jocularly.

"Faut manger en confiance, Monsieur," replied Lotte, in the usual formula, with twisting lips and a sniff that was nearly a sob.

"Many thanks—both you and Madame. Feed me, Lotte." And she knelt down by the bed, and dropped the soup slowly into the left side of his mouth, for the right side was too painful to move.

The soup did him good, but he suffered much pain, and during the afternoon Dr. Morin administered morphia, which gave him a long rest, and a consequent increase of strength when he woke up.

I was sitting by the bedside when he came to, and the first thing he asked was, "Seen after the boys to-day, Charlie?"

"No; I've been seeing after you to-day, Rode."

"Mustn't neglect 'em; I'm all right." And nothing at all would satisfy him but my going out, there and then, and buying the usual supplies, and making the usual rounds.

Every man in the hospital who was capable of speaking asked after him, and they all expressed their deep concern at his injuries, and sent him heaps of good wishes. Then I went back and gave him all their messages, and posted him as to the various cases, and it seemed to do him a world of good.

Considering all his damages, he picked up in a wonderful way. Marion Ray came in twice a day to see him, and Dr. Morin and the rest were unremitting in their attentions. Lotte and Madame saw to his feeding, and provided him with tempting dishes which, under all the circumstances of the case, could only be described as marvellous; and I relieved his anxiety as to "the boys," and acted as his almoner, and as constant bearer of their inquiries and messages, and his thanks.

And during all these days no trace of Marie, and I seemed as far from finding her as on the first day I entered the city.

Smartte pleased us all by the progress he was making,

but I knew it must be a very long time before he would be good for anything requiring any bodily exertion.

About ten days after the catastrophe, Dr. Marion Ray came in one day on his usual visit, and after his examination he said:

"Smartte, old man, if you'll take my advice, you'll get out of this city, and you'll get out now."

"Yes? Where to? The moon? No balloons for me, my boy. Shells, and little things of that kind, I don't mind; but balloons—not me."

"Who's talking of balloons? Washburne is sending all the Americans out in a day or two—that is, all who want to go. It would take more even than the Minister of the United States"—and there was just a sly hint of Southern sarcasm in his intonation—"to make 'em go if they didn't want to."

"Well, I don't want to go; I'm very well here."

"So far, you've done capitally, my boy; but here's the case. These blamed fools are going to let themselves be starved to death sooner than give in. That's all right; that's their own business. Only when they starve we've got to starve too; and starving's not good for a sick man. You want the very best of fresh country feeding. I tell you frankly, you take a very heavy responsibility if you stop here. There'll be no difficulty in your going, and it's the last chance you'll get. If you will take my advice, you'll go. Find some quiet country place, and just go to grass there for a few months."

"I don't know any quiet country place. And then, to go amongst strangers——"

"Glyn'll go with you, and look after you," said Ray.

"No, he can't," said Smartte quickly. "Glyn has greater interests here than myself."

"I shouldn't have thought it, by the way he's looked after you. No man ever was better cared for."

"He's been neglecting matters still nearer his heart on my account," said Smartte.

"What's your opinion, Glyn?" asked Ray.

"I think he ought to go; but we shall miss him terribly here. If you will take Marion Ray's advice, Rode, why not go to my mother, at Dinan? I'll promise you the very best of care and attention."

"Dinan—Brittany?" said Ray. "That's it. That's the very place for you, Smartte. The Prussians won't get there, and you'll be among friends; and if Glyn's faculty for nursing is in any way inherited you'll have the best of good times, and be a man again in three months. If you don't go, seeing what's coming, I won't guarantee that you'll keep this side of the sod. Sorry to say so, old chap, but that's simple truth. My own idea is that we'll have a devil of a time here before we get through. Washburne thinks the same. He's a Northerner, but he's straight, and about as shrewd as they make 'em."

"Let me think it over," said Smartte. "It hits me hard to think of leaving, even if the ship is sinking."

"I'll send in your name, anyhow," said Ray. "Then, if you decide to commit suicide, it'll be your own look out."

By dint of much thinking, and much urging on my part, he brought himself to it; though up to the very last—until, indeed, with the rest of the American convoy, the Creteil gate had closed irrevocably upon them—he was very loth to go, and kept suddenly deciding that he would stop on and see things through.

In the interval, however, he "fixed things so's they'd run without him, if he did bring his mind to quit." And this consisted chiefly in installing me in his place, to carry on the work he had set his hand to, and in which his heart was so much wrapt up.

"I'll leave you 40,000 francs, Charlie," he said. "That, I think, will see you through. Spend it any way you think I'd like it spent: on your own business and for these poor devils; either the broken boys, or the women and children if the feeding gets tighter, as it will I'm afraid. Do whatever you think right, and I want no accounts. Better let it remain at the Embassy, as I have done, and Washburne will give it you as you want it. There's folks in Paris would cut

your throat and burn the hotel down for a good deal less than 40,000 francs, though it don't amount to much when you put it into dollars."

Mr. Washburne came in to see him the following day; Smartte introduced me to him, and painfully produced, with his left hand, a signature to a document authorising him to hand me the money as I wanted it. The Minister expressed his own intention of sticking to his post, whatever happened. As long as any citizens of the United States remained, he considered it his duty to remain also; and, in addition, he looked upon it as an extremely interesting experience, and had no intention of missing any scrap of it. "Since it had to be," he said, "I'm mighty glad I'm here to see it, and I intend to see it through."

He was an exceedingly genial and kindly man, and shrewd to the extremities of his warmly-gripping fingers. I met him frequently afterwards, and conceived a very great admiration and liking for him. How gallantly he—alone, I think, of all the ambassadors—stuck to his post through those dark days, and through the still more terrible days that followed, even to the very bitter end, when all Paris seemed like to perish in a cataclysm of blood and fire, all the world knows, and some of us had reason to be profoundly thankful for.

I furnished my friend with a warm introduction to my mother, and when I wished him the final good-bye at the Creteil gate, and stood aside in the rain to let the rest of the convoy and the escort pass, I was both glad and sorry. For myself and for all his other friends inside sorry, for we should miss him much; but for his sake glad that he had yielded to our entreaties, for it gave him a better chance of thorough recovery than he could possibly have had if he had stopped.

Has my pen run away with me concerning my friend? I loved him dearly, and that chance meeting on the field of Choisy made for greater things in my life than I knew.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MONSIEUR JUDAS.

I CARRIED on Smartte's ministry exactly as I knew he would have had me do it, and did my very best to fill his place. I was, at best, but an inadequate substitute I fear, for my birthright carried with it its national limitations; and the airy camaraderie which made every heart his instant and willing captive was sadly awanting in me. And, in addition to my natural diffidence, my heart was tortured and my life sorely burdened by the utter failure of my quest for Marie. How we two were playing at hide and seek all this time you will see. Still, in my work at the hospitals I did my best; and in the more material matter of the dispensation of my friend's largesse I took good care that the boys did not suffer.

It was characteristic of him that he should have paid in advance for both my own and his board and lodging for the next three months, and that at siege rates. Madame of the Lion d'Or had treated him well. She was not to suffer because, as he expressed it, "he had made a mess of himself." Madame and Lotte were, of course, desolated at parting with him. I reaped the benefit—until such time as it was no longer available; until, in fact, the Lion d'Or and its warm-hearted mistress came to a sudden and violent end, one black day in January.

But that was a couple of months ahead, and much had happened before then; and, meanwhile, I lived there in much comfort, and, within certain slowly contracting bounds, in plenty.

All my spare time was spent in aimless, hopeful wanderings about the city, with one object in view but never in sight. It was useless to attempt any definite search. The field was too vast, the labyrinth too full of mazy twists and turnings. Any house in that whole vast hive might shelter her I sought. Even Svolski confessed himself utterly at

fault, but laid it down to the dislocation of the times; and with reason, for under the old régime, with its close surveillance and its myriad watchful eyes, the hidden secrets of the chambers were known, although they were not proclaimed from the housetops. And so my only hope was in chance or Providence, and hope long deferred made my heart grow sick.

Up to this time the people had been wonderfully quiescent. There were growlings and grumblings, of course. When the broken men came pouring back into the city after the usual fruitless sortie, the growlings broke out into anathemas against the powers who sent them forth and accomplished nothing. With 400,000 fighting men inside, and only 250,000 outside to keep them in, why, in the name of heaven, asked the hungry sufferers, was nothing done? Were they all to starve to death while the legal and military gentlemen of the Hôtel de Ville squabbled among themselves as to the best way to cut the knot? Then they were given another entertainment, in the shape of another sortie, and always the valiant troops won the day, yet found themselves back in their old quarters by night-time—less those who remained behind or came in in the ambulances.

In my wanderings I began to be painfully impressed by the hungry rows of people waiting for doles of food outside the ration bureaux. Hour after hour they stood there, women and children, patiently waiting for the morsels that might just keep soul and body together. In the better quarters were similar rows, waiting to purchase their tardy supplies of meat and bread. They had their money in their hands, and were by no means of the destitute classes; but, all the same, the food trickled slowly through official fingers, and they had to wait their turn.

On the evening of the day Smartte left the city was ablaze with excitement over the taking of Le Bourget. The tide had turned. The Francs-tireurs of the Presse, who had rushed the position in the morning, were the idols of the hour. Reinforcements were poured out to assist them. All night long there was furious firing going on to the north-east. The northern sky was filled with vivid streamers, and

the excited crowds, who surged about the streets in the sure belief that at last deliverance was at hand, cried to one another that the great heart of the universe palpitated in sympathy with the chosen people of Paris. All next day the fighting continued, and the crowds exulted in spite of the rain. The following day the same, and half the city swarmed towards La Villette to morally encourage the men at the front, and to get the first news of the veritable smashing of the cordon. We had broken one link, and held it, in spite of all the enemy's efforts to regain it. The rest was only a question of time. Paris was as good as free. The Germans were as sick of the war as we were. Were they not rotting in their trenches, and dying like sheep? Had not one of their wounded at Le Bourget on Friday cursed the authors of the war—meaning William of Prussia and Count Bismarck, of course? And on Monday morning, in a dense fog, the broken battalions came tumbling back along the Lille road, mud-stained, blood-stained, starving, and weary. The iron girdle was riveted afresh in the shambles at Le Bourget, and the heart of Paris spat itself out in curses.

Next day, before we had had time to recover from this blow, ominous little printed notices were stuck up outside the doors of the various *mairies* announcing the fall of Metz.

Then Paris flamed out, and I came within an ace of sudden death.

I was passing through the Place Vendôme that afternoon, and found it more crowded than usual. The men hung about in knots discussing the news. Stones were flung at the great iron column. One of a squad of National Guards, returning from duty on the ramparts, put up his gun and fired at the figure on top. The crowd applauded. A small, dark man at the corner of the Rue Castiglione was haranguing the bystanders with much vehemence. Behind him, on the wall of a house, was a proclamation signed "Rochefort," begging all good citizens to unite against the common enemy, and, above all, not to construct private barricades on their own account, as it only led to confusion. The orator foamed out the usual stock phrases of his kind. The country had been

betrayed. Sedan, Metz, Le Bourget. It was everywhere the same story. What was the use of them, the sovereign people, spending their blood and their treasure—from the looks of him it was difficult to imagine the gentleman having contributed much of either—when every man in authority was either a traitor or an imbecile, like those addle-headed lawyers at the Hôtel de Ville?

"A l'Hôtel de Ville!" shrieked the mob.

"A l'Hôtel de Ville!" shouted the orator, and pointed dramatically towards the obvious way thither, which was by the street where I happened to be standing, with no shadow of ill intent in my heart, and never an idea how near I was to death at that moment.

Perhaps I had smiled at the incongruity between the speaker's appearance and his flaming words. I will grant the mob that possible smile; it is absolutely the only concession I can make them. Perhaps the fiery speaker caught that possible smile, and was cut to the quick by it. Possibly he wanted a practical tag by way of peroration.

"Traitors and spies! The city is full of them! They are with us in every guise. There stands one!" And he pointed a vindictive and dirty finger straight at me.

Before I could open my mouth, rough hands grabbed me on all sides. I was pushed and pulled and hustled in half a dozen directions at once, while the crowd roared, "Down with the spy! Down with the Prussian! Kill him! Shoot him! To the water!"

I tried to wrench myself free. I shouted at top of my voice, "I am no spy, Messieurs. I am engaged nursing your wounded. I am an Englishman."

"Same thing!" cried one, and aimed a blow at my head, while others shouted to a gang of passing Nationals to come and make an end of a sacré rat of a Prussian spy.

Things were looking very nasty. It seemed to me that in another minute my life might end, as many another innocent man's ended on the Paris pavements during the siege.

Then, as the crowd opened to let the Nationals through,

my eye lighted on a face I knew—a broad-brimmed, flat beaver above it, and below a long, black soutane; and, for once in my life, my heart beat hopefully at sight of a Jesuit priest.

"There is one who knows me," I gasped, still struggling with my captors; "M. le Curé, there. He will tell you I am no Prussian."

"Voyons donc!" said a huge fellow in a blouse, whose big hand alone in my collar went far towards choking me. "Father, come here, and identify your wandering sheep." And M. le Curé was hustled through the crowd towards us with no great ceremony.

"Now," shouted the big man, "do you know him?"

"Mon dieu, no! I never set eyes on him before," said M. le Curé. And the big man aimed a blow at me with his other hand which would have settled the question for ever, so far as I was concerned; but I dropped suddenly, and we swung round together.

"Stay!" I shouted, with all the vehemence that was in me. "He is lying, or else he does not recognise me yet. M. Lesieur, I am Charles Glyn——"

"I know nothing of the man," said M. le Curé coldly. "He is probably a Prussian spy." And the crowd roared angrily.

"Ah, liar!" I shouted once more. "And what of M. de Kerhuel, whom you have had locked up at Querhoal for twenty years?" He started, and my captor noticed it. "And shall I tell you where Raoul is, and why he avoids you?" I cried once more. And once more the priest started.

"Yes, he is lying," said the big man. "He knows you; but that doesn't prove you're not a spy."

And then, suddenly, the crowd that filled the roadway surged back on to the pavement, to give way to a regiment of Mobiles, who came pressing urgently through towards the Rue Rivoli, scattering the people and the Nationals like chaff before them. And striding at their head, in gold-braided képi and captain's uniform, was—George de Kerhuel.

"George! George! De Kerhuel! A moi!" I yelled at the top of my lungs; and he looked round.

"It is I, Charles Glyn," I cried; and he halted his men, and pushed roughly through the crowd.

"Now then! What's all this?" he asked harshly, and the big man released the remains of my collar.

"But, M. le Capitaine, they say he is a spy."

"You damned silly fools! You've got spy on the brain. If some of you would fight, instead of loaf and shout at street corners, we should not be where we are. This gentleman is my brother-in-law."

"He may be a spy, all the same," shouted a National Guard with a red face and watery eyes.

"Ready, men! Present!" cried George to his Mobiles; and as the guns flew up to their shoulders the crowd disappeared from our immediate neighbourhood, Nationals and all, like dust before a March gale, and we stood quite alone.

"Better come with us, Charles," said George. "There's trouble afoot." And, too full for speech, and trembling in every limb, I walked away with him and his men down the Rue Castiglione.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, as we turned into the Rue Rivoli.

The streets were full of people. The crowds increased as we proceeded.

"It's a long story," I said. "In the first place, I'm looking for Marie."

"For Marie?" he almost shouted, and came to a full stop to look at me, whereby the whole regiment was checked, and those behind looked inquiringly ahead to see what was in the way, hoping, no doubt, that it was a body of Nationals to be made into mincemeat, for they hated the very sight of their uniforms.

"For Marie?" said George once more, depressing his men's hopes by resuming his march. "Is Marie in Paris?"

"We fear so. She left Dinan on the 10th of September to come and nurse you."

"Nurse me?" he cried, almost stopping again in his amazement.

"You have not been wounded?"

"I? No, never a scratch. What's the meaning of it all, Charles? Tell me quickly."

"They received a telegram at Kerhuel, begging Marie to come up and nurse you, as you had been wounded. It was signed with your name. I have it at my hotel."

"Great God in heaven! And she came?"

"Yes, she set off at once."

"Alone?"

"No, old Henriette came with her."

"And you, Charles? Why not you?"

"I was in Metz."

"In Metz—you?"

"Yes, I was there till the middle of September. Surgeon, with Frossard's corps. I swam out, found Marie had left for Paris a few days before I reached Dinan, and came on at once to look after her. I came in here September 30th."

"And you have not found her?"

"Not a trace of her."

"Oh, mon dieu! My poor little Marie!" he groaned.

"I have had detectives on the matter, and done everything; but so far without result."

"And who——?" he asked, and hesitated.

"Raoul de Querhoal," I said.

"I might have guessed that. He is dead."

"I know that. I saw him die."

"You did?" he said quickly.

"Yes; near the old church, this side the Fontainebleau road, during the fight at Choisy."

"Yes," he said, and walked in silence for a time.

"Where are we going?" I asked at last.

"To the Hôtel de Ville. Flourens and his Reds have locked Trochu and the rest into a back room. We are going to get them out."

"When will you be off duty? I want a talk with you."

"God knows," he said. "Everything may be in a cocked hat before morning if those gabbling idiots get the upper hand."

The courtyard of the Louvre was full of soldiers, all

Mobiles or of the Line. An officer inside signalled to George, who halted his men and went up to the railings, through which he and the other had an energetic conversation. Then he came back, and we went on again at a quickstep.

"He wanted me to stop with the rest," he said to me. "Afraid my men may pitch in with the Nationals, when they see how many of them there are down there. I told him they'd sooner eat them, they hate them so. These fellows are all Bretons, you see, and I'm Breton too, and we've taken to one another. I've only had them a fortnight, but they'd do anything for me."

"I'd like to hear all your news over a decent dinner," I said. "I've got heaps to tell you, and you must have plenty to tell me."

"I haven't had a decent dinner for months," he said. "They give us the salt meat, and keep all the fresh for those damned Nationals and the butchers' shops; and this is all they get by it."

"You've been going ahead since I saw you," I said.

"Yes." And he laughed a harsh little laugh, with no mirth in it. "Commission and three grades inside a month."

"That's smart work."

"A case of extremity and opportunity," he said. "They were short of officers with brains, and my being able to speak to these men in their own tongue got me the position. They're very fine fellows, and will make splendid soldiers in time."

Instead of going straight on through the increasing crowds, he turned down the Rue St. Denis to the Quais, and we crossed the Place du Châtelet, and saw that the great square of the Hôtel de Ville was black with people, and the air was filled with their roaring. We worked round to the rear of the great building, and entered by a gate into the courtyard. There George halted his men again, called a lieutenant and gave him some instructions, and said a few words in guttural Breton to the nearer men, who repeated them along the line. He turned to me and said:

"If you take my advice, Charles, you will stop here with the boys. I'm going inside to bring out Trochu; and I'll get him, if I have to fire the building, and fight my way out. There's no need for you to be mixed up in it."

"All right, my boy; I'll wait here for you."

He gave a sharp word of command, and marched in at a back door, with about a hundred of his men at his heels. The patriots in front were much too busy demonstrating to notice him.

We waited a very long time, and I chatted with the lieutenant. He expressed a fervent wish for half an hour in the square, and a free hand for himself and his men.

"We'd take it out of those Nationals, I warrant you, Monsieur," he said, with much yearning.

"I'd no idea there was such strong feeling between you," I said. "My time has been spent in the hospitals."

"Ah! And have you ever in your life seen a National there, Monsieur? If there was one, I'll bet he was wounded in the back."

"They've certainly mostly been of the Line or Mobiles."

"Of course; these others do nothing but brag and bluster, and swagger about and drink, and skulk out of sight when there's any chance of getting hurt."

Possibly he was prejudiced, but there was no possible doubt as to his feelings in the matter.

We waited a very long time; so long that I asked the lieutenant if he thought anything could have happened to the captain.

"Not at all," he said. "If anything had happened, we should hear something of it, and I should go in with the rest of the men. Possibly they have found something to eat in there; I wish I was inside too. I have every confidence in M. de Kerhuel; he can take care of himself, and the men would follow him to the devil."

George came out at last; and with him, in a state of great excitement, came a tall man, at sight of whom my friend the lieutenant said briskly:

"Trochu. He has got him. Very good, very good"

My recollection of General Trochu is of a soldierly man, with a rather good-looking face, well-trimmed moustache and imperial, and his brows at the moment pinched into an expression of excited determination. When he took off his képi, and waved it to the men, his forehead seemed expansive by reason of a very bald head.

We set off at a quick walk, with the general securely safeguarded on either side and front and rear, and, going this time all the way by the Quais, got safely to the Louvre, where he had his headquarters.

That was how I involuntarily assisted at the abortive revolution of the 31st October.

CHAPTER XXV.

BLACK FRUIT OF QUERCY.

George sent me home under escort, while the drums were beating wildly all over the city; and he promised to come to the hotel the following night for dinner, if he could possibly get away.

"Don't trouble if I don't turn up," he said. "As things are just now, one cannot tell what an hour may bring forth, but I'll come if possible."

Madame and Lotte were voluble in their expressions of concern and indignation at the treatment I had been subjected to.

"God knows what we're all coming to," said Lotte; "but it's all the fault of those cursed Prussians. Ach-r-r-r!"—with a tigerish display of pretty white teeth—"if I had that miserable here"—meaning King William of Prussia—"I'd scratch his old face for him. He is of the devil. But yes, mon dieu!"

Dr. Morin, at the hospital, as soon as he heard of it, gave me a written appointment as surgeon on the staff, which he said might come in useful in the present disturbed state of affairs. And when George put in an appearance on the following night, with a big appetite both for food and news, he had thoughtfully brought with him a permit signed by General Trochu himself, authorising me to circulate freely in the city. What might be the exact effect of such a document on the tempers and understandings of the opposing faction, if I should fall into their hands again, I could not quite say; but I was glad to have the document all the same, and I have it yet.

I let George finish the best dinner the Lion d'Or could furnish before getting to my weightier news; and I must say he enjoyed his novel faring very heartily.

He was greatly altered in every way since last I saw him. He seemed at least ten years older, and his face was grave to

gloominess; he rarely even smiled. A hard, intent, aggressive look seemed to have become natural to it. It was the face of a man engaged on a forlorn hope, from which he has no expectation of coming out alive; not despondent, full of determination, but somehow hopeless and careless of life.

When we sat, at last, smoking over our coffee, I said:

"I have got some very strange news for you, George."

"You are full of strange news, Charles."

"Yes. Listen! The day before I left Kerhuel, your father came home."

He looked at me with a look that expressed doubt of his own sanity or soberness, or mine, the smoke curling slowly out of his open mouth.

"My—father, Charles? Are you quite mad, or am I?"

"Neither. I am telling you sober truth. If the simple telling is so startling, you can imagine what the actual happening was to your mother, and Godefroi, and myself."

"But—he is buried at Dinan."

"So everyone supposed; but it is not he who is buried there. Do you remember Jean's story of a strange, wild man who was kept confined in the corner room at Querhoal?"

"At Querhoal?" he gasped, staring wildly at me.

"That was your father; and for close on twenty years he had been kept there. There is no possible doubt about it, but what it all means we have not yet found out. He has been out of his mind, and remembers nothing now he is restored whole. An accident, similar to the one that darkened his mind twenty years ago, went some way towards restoring it. We assisted the tendency with an operation, and I have every hope that he will be himself again."

I told him the whole story, and he listened in silence, broken only by ejaculations of the most profound amazement.

"But what does it all mean, Charles? I am lost."

"It means a very black story of some kind; and the man who holds the key, and could tell us all about it, is here in Paris."

"Who?" he snapped vehemently.

"M. le Curé—M. Lesieur."

"He? Why do you think that?" he asked hoarsely.

I told him of what I saw in the wood that day, and he became greatly excited.

"Where is he? I will tear it out of him."

"Did you not see him in the crowd yesterday, when you came to my help? I have been searching for him for a month past, in hopes of finding Marie through him. He was living at the house to which that telegram called her, but he got wind of our inquiries and disappeared, and my detectives have utterly failed to find him. I never saw him again till yesterday. Then, seeing him in the crowd, I cried to him to come and tell them I was no spy."

"And he——"

"Denied all knowledge of me, and condemned me to death. If you had been a minute later, we should not be sitting here together now."

"The cur! The devil! I'll find him, and tear his heart out. And you think he knows where Marie is?"

"That I cannot say. He was living in that house." And I handed him the telegram giving the address for Marie to go to. "But my own idea is that Raoul was playing him false also. On the day of Choisy I saw M. le Curé hastening to the field—I imagine to look for Raoul. But he did not find him."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he was buried before M. le Curé got there."

"Did you bury him?"

"No; the Prussians."

"You said you were there, Charles. Tell me what you saw."

"I was up in the tower of the little church. I saw a company of soldiers come rushing towards the church, with an officer in front, and another on a brown horse cheering them on at the side. The officer fell, and a man leaped out and caught him, and then rushed on ahead of the rest, and drove the Prussians back. When I went down, I found the officer was Raoul de Querhoal."

"Yes," he said grimly; "and the man who caught him was myself. I shot him through the back, and I wanted to tell him so."

"You, George?" I said, horrified. "But——"

"Yes, I shot him; but I found, when I had hold of him, that a dozen others had done the same. There were just about a dozen of the old regiment sprinkled in among the Mobiles as backbone, and every man of them hated him like the devil. He was dead when I picked him up. I dropped him, and rushed at the Prussians, in the hope of dying there. I had no wish to live, and that, I suppose, was why I came out without a scratch. The man on the brown horse was Vinoy himself He was good enough to notice my intrepidity, as he was pleased to call it"—he laughed his grim, short laugh, which grated like a file—"and he named me for a commission that same night. They were short of trained officers, you see, especially for the Breton Mobiles, many of whom barely understood ordinary French. It amused me to think that I should step into a commission over Raoul's dead body. Since then I have tried, on every possible occasion, to throw away my life; but the bullets turn aside, and, with men falling all around me, I have not been touched. Perhaps I have been spared to tear M. le Curé's black heart out; and, by God! I'll do it the first time I lay hands on him. The hound!"

He examined the telegram. "I do not even know where the Rue Duvernois is," he said. "We must find her, Charles. What can we do?"

"If you can suggest anything, I'll do it. I have thought and thought till my head splits and my heart has grown sick."

"She may be in the direst want; in fact, I don't see how she can help being so. I don't suppose she brought much money with her. She may be starving——"

"Don't! It is maddening to think of, and to have to sit with folded hands waiting for something to turn up. But what can we do?"

He had to confess, as I had long since, that there was nothing to be done but trust to Providence.

"Wherever she is, she need not absolutely starve, if she knows how to keep from it," he said. "They are making a daily distribution of food to all who ask for it now. It is not much, but always something, and the one-sou soup at the city canteens is not bad. I tried it the other day, and I swear it's better than we get, horse or no horse."

The cost of the dinner we had just partaken of would probably have furnished between two and three hundred of such meals as we were hopefully discussing the possibility of Marie procuring, and neither of us but would have gone fasting for a week, and starved for a month, to give her the more. It was an ironical situation, and we had no more means of improving it than a summer fly has of stopping a thunder shower.

We went along to Svolski's together, to see if that astute gentleman had discovered anything; but he had not, and he expressed himself as greatly grieved that I had not stuck tight to M. le Curé when I had him at arm's length. He convinced George that under the new system—or, rather, since the upsetting of the old—the tracing of any person in Paris was now next to impossible, and George had to acknowledge that it was so.

One idea was evolved from our talk, and I acted on it at once; and that was to visit in turn every one of the new public canteens throughout Paris, and also the ration bureaux where the bread tickets were given out, to see if Marie or Henriette frequented either one or other.

This took much time, and some extended journeys. Fortunately there was a lull in the fighting just then, and my time was more my own. Trochu had got the upper hand of the Reds for the time being, and a new lease of life, pending trial of his great plan, which folk had begun to lose faith in. There had been talk, too, of an armistice, and a revictualling of the city. It came to nothing, but it gave the people something to talk about.

I visited one of the *cantines économiques* each day, and hung about it watching the frequenters, to the great distress

and humiliation of many who were forced thither by the pangs of hunger, much against their will. I haunted the bread-ticket bureaux, but it was all haphazard work at best, and nothing came of it.

George dropped in to dine with me two or three times a week—just as often, in fact, as he could manage it—and I had no compunction in his enjoying the dinners which Smartte paid for, but was not there to eat. For myself, indeed, I began to feel no little distaste at living thus in comparative luxury, while misery was increasing all round; but if I did not eat what my friend had provided for me, Madame of the Lion d'Or would be the sole beneficiary, and Madame's remuneration was already munificent. The sights I saw in my daily visitations, however, decided me to make a change, and Madame and I came near to having a pitched battle on the subject.

She held, as from her point of view she had an absolute right to do, that since our dear Monsieur Smartte had paid her in advance a certain prearranged tariff, all she had to do was to fulfil her side of the bargain to the utmost extent in her power; and I am bound to say she did it admirably and marvellously. George and I tried, as vainly as Smartte used to do, to extract information from Lotte as to the components of some of the exquisitely sauced dishes which were set before us; but our questions were always skilfully fenced, and her very last line of defence was always:

"But, it is not good, then?"

"Oh, it is most excellent."

"Eh bien, Messieurs, mangez en confiance alors." And we never got beyond that.

But when, one day, in my own district, I saw a little old lady, nicely but quietly dressed in black, and wearing a veil over her face, tottering to the public canteen with a little tin can under her cloak, something impelled me to follow her home, to her very great annoyance and distress. I think she took me for one of M. de Keratry's new policemen. She hobbled up the stair of her house, and slammed her door in my face.

However, I persisted, and finally, in dread of worse happening if she did not, she opened it, and confronted me.

"Well, sir, what do you want?" she demanded tremulously; and I went inside and closed the door.

"I trust you will pardon my intrusion, Madame," I said; "I have come to be of service to you, if I may."

"I have asked nothing of you, sir."

"Not in words, Madame, truly; but I have a mother of my own in La Bretagne, and if she needed help, and a stranger tendered it, I should be grateful to him."

To that she only bowed, but relaxed slightly in her manner, leaving the onus of further suggestion to me.

"The times are sadly out of joint, Madame. I have been left in the city by a wealthy friend, an American, who was sorely hurt picking up your wounded at Chatillon. It was necessary for his recovery that he should leave Paris, and he begged me to carry on his work, and left with me funds for that purpose."

"And how does this concern me, Monsieur?"

"My friend's great desire was to lessen the suffering of the war wherever he could. I have thought, Madame, that perhaps you could assist me. Are any of your neighbours feeling the pinch of the times?"

"Mon dieu, Monsieur! What a question! Are we not all suffering? But they would most of them sooner starve outright than let it be known. The times are very sad!"

A door behind us opened suddenly.

"Dites donc, grandmère, hast thou got the good soup?" And a dark-eyed small boy, of some seven or eight years of age, bounced into the passage. He was pale and thin, but not lacking in energy. He stopped at sight of me, and then ran up to his grandmother, and drew the tin can from under her cloak. "The little Marie is crying because her stomach aches," he said; "but it is only that she needs some soup. This will make her all right." And, with all the proud happiness of a relieving general who succeeds in throwing food into the beleaguered city, he carried the little tin triumphantly into the next room.

My dear old lady's eyes were full of tears. "Their

father died at Woerth," she said. "I do my best for them, but it is difficult."

"You will permit me, my dear Madame, on behalf of my friend, to help with the burden. It will not be long before the good times come again."

"Never, never!" she murmured quietly, but quite uncomplainingly. And I knew that for very many the times never could be again as they had been.

"In ten minutes I will return, Madame, and we will have a little chat." And I went out quickly, and bought food and a supply of chocolates and little fancy cakes, of which, strangely enough, there was never any lack, though the prices had risen.

The look in the old lady's eyes, and the delighted clap of little Marie's hands at sight of the delicacies she had been so long without, were better than a full meal, and I took shame to myself at thought of the many full meals I had eaten, while little ones like these were scraping along with sore, empty stomachs all round me.

That night I tackled Madame of the Lion d'Or. For a long while she would hear of nothing but fulfilling her contract with M. Smartte according to his declared wishes; and it was only when I stated my intention of quitting the hotel then and there, unless she fell in with my ideas, that she gave way.

After that my meals consisted of soup and one dish of meat; and the remaining value of the contract, made up into plain, wholesome soup mostly, was distributed, as far as it would go, among the needy whom Madame Joux, my first old lady, indicated to me as sorely needing it—that is, as far as they would accept it. Some absolutely refused to do so, though the old lady, with the tears in her eyes, said she knew they were starving. Strangely enough, many who at first declined to have any dealings with me accepted the proffered help with gratitude when they heard it came from an American source.

"But yes," said they, "the Americans are good; they have done much for us, and we do not hate them."

My new friends were all of the decent lower middle class, whose wage-earners had disappeared in chaos; and these, throughout the siege, were undoubtedly the greatest sufferers. The lower classes insisted on being provided for, and were in comparative clover; and the better classes who had money could still buy sufficient to live on. It was upon such as these, who could earn nothing, since there was no work for them even if they could have done it, and who were ashamed to beg, that the grim claw of hunger fell sharpest. It was these who suffered the bitterest miseries throughout that bitter time.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FACE OF A FRIEND.

THE winter darkened down on us, and my heart grew ever sicker and still more sick at thought of what my dear girl might, almost certainly must, be suffering; and, God help me! I was as helpless in the matter as the most sorely wounded man in the Salpêtrière.

They were sober, despondent meals George de Kerhuel and I ate together in those dark November days of 1870, and the thought of our dear Marie starving in loneliness and misery was very bitter to us.

From George I heard most of what was going on: of Trochu's endless vacillations; of his avowed lack of faith in his men; of the men's openly expressed failure of confidence —not in his good faith, but in his power to accomplish anything; of the dissensions at headquarters; of Trochu's barefaced attempts to advance his friend Ducrot at the expense of Vinoy, the soldiers' general.

"Mon dieu!" I can hear George saying. "Conceive, my friend, I had a return to make to M. le Général only this morning. It was eleven o'clock, and he was in his dressing-gown and slippers still. And he talked—mon dieu! how he talked! I could not get in a single word, and I left without delivering my report; and of all that he said I remember nothing but the fact that the end is near. But whether that means he's going to cut the cordon or throw up the sponge I don't know; and, between you and me, I don't believe he knows himself. It is very depressing."

And so we came by comparatively quiet, if gloomy, ways to the last days of November; and then matters took a turn, and things began to happen.

All day long on the 28th the forts at our end of the city kept up a terrific bombardment. Madame and Lotte were certain the Prussians were coming in, and forthwith commenced secreting provisions and everything of value in the

cellars. But I remembered von Marcius's declaration that the forts always announced a sortie in this way, and I knew that the Prussians would get all they wanted, and at very much smaller cost, by sitting still and letting the grisly enemy inside the city do their work for them. So I set down the disturbance to a sortie, and if noise was anything to go by, I judged it would be on an unusually large scale.

All that day the streets of our quarter were echoing with the roll of gun-carriages and the tramp of vast bodies of troops. Some went east towards Vincennes, and some south-east towards Bicêtre and our old battlefield of Choisy, which I knew so well. Our ambulances were ordered to be at the Château de Vincennes that afternoon by five o'clock. We duly arrived there, and shivered through a bitter cold night, with nothing to do but listen to the pounding of the forts out beyond us. In the morning we were told to go home again; the attack was postponed for twenty-four hours. We were to be back by five o'clock that afternoon. Later on we heard there had been a shortage of pontoons for the bridges across the river.

This time they came fully provided, and before daylight the troops were pouring across, to the tune of such deafening music from the big guns of the forts as was like to crack our ear drums. As the light grew we could see the great loop of the Marne like a coil of dull lead piping under the grey sky, and inside the loop there was the sound of heavy fighting, though little of it could we see.

All day long the battle waxed and waned; now apparently dying down, and then, after a breathing space, bursting out with renewed vigour. Bit by bit we had followed the troops, over the shaky bridges, along a road that ran parallel with the southern bend of the river to a village which I was told was Champigny, and there we began picking up the wounded. Rendering such services as were possible on the field, I sent off waggon after waggon, and saw nothing of the fighting which was going on hotly on some wooded slopes about a mile and a half away.

Soon after mid-day it came rolling back our way, and the

village was filled with a disorderly mob of Mobiles. They were about falling back still further, when a frantic general came galloping up, and reinforcements appeared. Someone said it was Ducrot. The position was held, and nightfall found me still there awaiting the return of the waggons, for the dead and wounded lay in vast heaps, and how all the latter were to be conveyed back to the city I could not imagine. Even by the shortest road, by Charenton, we were a good seven miles from the hospitals, and it took not far short of three hours to make the double journey.

The night was bitterly cold. As many as possible I got into the houses of Champigny, but the harvest was too full for the gleaners, and in spite of all our labours very many lay out in the frost all night, and were stiff and stark in the morning.

Load after load we sent off to the city all night long, with fresh relays of horses; and those for whom there was not room in the waggons we wrapped in blankets and served with hot wine, but it was a very miserable night for all of us.

There was a brilliant moon, and by its light the search parties nibbled away at the silent heaps scattered like wind-swept leaves over all the countryside. Dead and wounded together, there were supposed to be some four thousand French alone. At first it was easy to discriminate between dead and living; but as the night grew older it became next to impossible, for the cold was so intense that it came near freezing our marrows, and in the wounded it induced a lethargy so like death that in many cases a hasty examination passed them as dead. And dead to all intents and purposes they then were, for they never woke up from their stupor. Their sufferings, at all events, were small compared with those who lay helpless but still in possession of their senses, waiting for the slow relief, while the frost rime gathered on beard and eyelid, and death clutched feet and fingers, and stole slowly up towards the failing heart.

I toiled among the fragments till my back felt broken, and heart and body were alike sick of the gruesome business,

I had been hard at work since midday, and at midnight I knocked off to get a couple of hours' sleep, leaving some of the later arrivals still at it.

The village was crammed with troops and provision trains. Our line of outposts stretched northwards out of sight. Away to the left, down by the river, were numerous watchfires. To the east, about half a mile away, the moonbeams glinted now and again on helmet or gun-barrel, where the Prussian outposts faced the French. The night had drawn a truce, for the fighting had been of the fiercest, and both sides were exhausted; but the terrible game was not yet either won or lost. It had still to be played out.

I had made a rapid round of the wounded we had gathered into some of the outlying houses, adjusting a temporary bandage here and tightening a tourniquet there, and had worked my way to the furthest house on the north side of the village, where I intended to drop into a vacant corner if good luck should discover me one.

Just as I was entering the door, I thought I heard a faint cry, away out under the cold moonlight, and I stood listening. But the silence of death hung over the stark waste, and setting it down to jangled nerves I turned to enter the cottage. Faint and thin, like the mew of a week-old kitten, it came again, and I walked towards the quarter from which it seemed to come. I came to a sentry, and asked him if he had heard a wounded man crying out.

"But yes, truly, Monsieur," he said. "I have heard him for an hour or more."

"Where is he?"

"God knows. Over there, it seemed to me," pointing back the way I had come, and we both stood straining our ears to catch the cry again

It was a very long time of coming. It seemed as if it would never come—as if the last cry we had heard was the final one. But it came at last, a tiny pipe, and apparently very far away.

"He's not dead, anyhow," said the sentry. "It's over there, Monsieur." And he pointed in quite a different direction.

"No; over yonder, I think."

"Voyons, it's hard to say. Have we won the fight, Monsieur?"

"I fear it's not finished yet."

"All the same we are here, where they were before."

"That is so far good. Now I must seek that man who cried for help." And I left him, and went in my own direction, stepping softly, lest I should lose the next sound.

I must have walked quite ten minutes, when I heard it close at hand, and pushing on up rising ground found myself on the brink of a yawning hollow, the half of which lay black in the moonlight.

"Anyone down there?" I shouted.

"À moi, à moi!" came the response; and I cast round till I came upon an opening which led into the quarry or gravel pit.

"À moi, à moi!"

The place was full of holes, and strewn thick with dead. I stepped carefully among them, slipped once in spite of all my care, and came down on hands and knees on a piece of ice; and the thin ice broke, and bled blood, and my hands were red when I got up.

"À moi, à moi!" And at last I found him; and a very strange sight he was.

He was a small artilleryman—of Faron's Division, he told me later on—and he lay wedged in tight between two big Wurtemburgers, who lay face downwards almost on top of him, and his head was pillowed on a third. Whatever was wrong below, his arms were all right, and he had used them to excellent purpose. He had unstrapped the Germans' rolled-up overcoats, and drawn them over him like a coverlet. He had even opened their knapsacks, and helped himself to their rations.

He looked up anxiously at me as I bent over him, and sighed a fervent "Dieu merci!" when he was satisfied I was a man, and not a ghoul.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"My leg was broken in the morning," he said feebly, "and these two fell on me."

"Take a pull of this," and I handed him my flask.

He drank, and brightened up.

"You've made good use of them," I said.

"They were dead, and I was alive," he said.

"Lie quiet, and I'll get a stretcher. You're all right now. I'll have you under cover in no time."

"You'll come back, Monsieur?" he asked anxiously.

"I'll be back in a few minutes." And I stepped back across the dead, and ran across to the line of outposts, and found a stretcher party. And inside twenty minutes I had my latest find safe in a room where a fire glimmered on twenty other groaning men, and where there was not room to stand, but where, nevertheless, we found room for him.

And little idea, indeed, had I of the magnitude of my find, as I temporarily bound up his leg, and gave him his drink of hot spiced wine.

He was only a common artilleryman, by name Lepine, a decent, quiet lad. Nevertheless, that night's work was to profit me later on, in a time when safety seemed impossible, and all hope and thought of it had fled.

So one sows and reaps.

Next day, to my surprise, there was no fighting. We worked hard from morning till night, and got all our wounded into the city. Lepine I sent in one of our own ambulances to the Salpétrière. The following day was another hot time—for the men on the field. Until they cooled down it was cold work for the rest of us, but as soon as the fighting ceased and the bugles sounded the retreat we had our hands full.

Twenty-four hours later found most of us back within the city lines. Ten thousand Frenchmen, less such salvage as we had managed to retrieve in the ambulances, remained in that deadly loop of the Marne; and General Ducrot, having vowed a foolish vow never to re-enter the city save as a victor, stayed outside the walls till such time as he could find some adequate loophole by which he might creep in again. And so ended the Great Sortie. Net result, a few thousand less on the ration list, a few thousand more in the

hospitals. For the rest, as you were—only more so, for no greater attempt to break the iron band was possible, and hope began to fail.

I crawled back to the Lion d'Or more dead than alive from sheer weariness, craving nothing more, for the moment, in this world than a hot bath, a good dinner, and twenty-four hours' sleep. I was simply dead beat, but there was to be no sleep for me just yet.

"There is a gentleman waiting for you upstairs," said Lotte, as soon as she had recovered from the first sight of me.

"Captain de Kerhuel?" I asked.

"Dieu! Non!" And in a discreet whisper, which somehow managed to convey a hint of apology to the world at large for my possession of such an acquaintance, "It is a mulatto—a Turco."

I climbed slowly up the stairs, wondering who the deuce my visitor could be, for I had certainly no acquaintance among Turcos, unless at the hospital.

But, sure enough, a Turco, as large as life, sat by the fire smoking a cigar, and as I entered he gave a shout of delight and jumped at me.

"Hurrah, my boy! Here you are at last. That exceedingly pretty girl downstairs said you'd be sure to turn up some time, unless you'd gone and got killed."

"Good heavens! Hugh Myrtle? Or is it only Hugh Myrtle's spirit in its natural colours?" I cried.

"Very much in the flesh, old man, and as empty as a drum. Feel that hand—colour's fast. Shall I ring for dinner? I can see you're starving, too." And he rang the bell without waiting for an answer.

"And how did you manage it, Hugh? I'd about given you up."

"I came in with the ruck this morning," he said gaily, "and I got into these things to escape awkward questions."

"You shall tell me all about it as we eat. I've had nothing to speak of for three days——"

"Same here."

"I must have a wash first. I've been handling bodies till I'm sick of them."

"Cut away! I've been using your soap already, but this stuff won't come off. Don't be long, or I'll clear the table."

He was prowling hungrily round, chewing a piece of bread and eyeing the soup, when I got back, and we sat in at once.

"One question before you begin, Myrtle. How has M. de Kerhuel gone on?"

"He had a very tough time, and old Daly chose to go and be ill also, and that's what kept me. The operation was all right, and his brain is clear. Blank, of course, as to the last twenty years, and he finds it difficult to fit present and past. But, curiously enough, his bodily health seemed to weaken as his brain strengthened, and I dared not leave him till fourteen days ago. Have you found Mademoiselle? Her mother is in great distress about her; but I told her you were sure to be with her, only it was impossible to send any news."

"I have never set eyes on her, Myrtle." And he whistled. "The telegram that brought her here was all a trick. Her brother has never been wounded. She was not at the address given. I have employed detectives. I have done all possible. However, we'll go into that later. One other thing—— More soup?"

"Thanks! This is the first square meal I've had for fourteen days, as old Smartte would say——"

"Smartte? That was what I was going to ask you. Did he get to Dinan all right?"

"Did he! Did he not! Dinan is alive, for the first time in its life."

"That's all right, then. He's a splendid fellow. Now go ahead with your story. More soup? You'll burst, old chap."

"Fourteen days' vacuum to fill, my boy, against your three."

So, over our dinner, which Madame had thoughtfully

made an unusually good one, to make up for those I had lost, he told me his story.

By Smartte's advice he had taken the northern route, as the Orléans district was in chaos through continued fighting.

He had fallen in with Francs-tireurs, just as I had, but most fortunately fell into the hands of an Irish leader of the ignoble snipers, one Ryan, from Tipperary. "A regular broth of a boy," said Myrtle, "who was fighting just from pure love of it. He took me in hand, and brought me round here to the east, and a devil of a time we had of it. Why, my boy, what on earth would you have done if you had broken out? The country for fifty miles behind the Germans is scraped as clean as a bone; you couldn't feed a pig on it. However, Ryan got me within sight of their outposts, and then commended me to all the saints, and said goodbye, and I wriggled on alone. Then you people were good enough to create a diversion in front. I took it you'd got wind of my coming, and wanted to help me all you could; and I tell you, you rattled 'em all along the line. If you'd pushed on without any stop, you'd have got through; though what you'd have done when you *had* got through rather beats me. I crept up in the rear, to a place where a canal opens out of the river. That was the night before last; and a beastly cold night it was. I stood the water for a couple of hours, and nearly died. I had heard the firing all day, and knew that heavy fighting was afoot. I jogged up against a pontoon bridge, and crawled ashore about pumped out. I found this gentleman"—pointing to his clothes—"lying alongside the bridge. He had no need of his clothes—I had. We exchanged. That is, I took his things, and he took to the water. He had been shot through the lungs, and I knew just how he would feel, so I adopted his wound too, to the extent of coughing horribly, and choking and gasping, and declining to talk if anyone came near me. There were a lot of stragglers, and I coughed along among them. At one of the bridges there were a lot of ornamentally-dressed gentlemen on guard. An officer tried to stop us, and drove some

of us back to the field, where fighting was still going on; but when he saw me, and heard me cough, he only said, 'Poor devil!' and let me pass, and I got in without any trouble. That's all the story, my boy. It was simple as A B C."

"And how did you find me out?"

"Went straight to M. Dellieu, and he told me you were here; and I'm bound to say you seem pretty well fixed. If this is siege fare, it strikes me I could stand quite a lot of it."

"This is three days' dinners rolled into one; but, really, so far there has been no very great suffering, except among certain classes." And I explained the general situation to him.

"Well, now, what can you find for me to do?" he asked. "I've come in to work. Can I help you in your search for Mademoiselle?"

"I don't see that you can, Hugh. I've done everything man can do. I'm going round the ration offices one by one now, in hopes of coming across her that way; but it's the merest chance if anything comes of it, and it's terribly slow work."

"I can halve your work in that, at all events."

"Unfortunately you can't, or I'd ask you to. You see, old Henriette Dobain is with Marie, and the chances are it would be Henriette who would go out for food, and you don't know her."

"Well, then, hospital work."

"Yes; there I can place you. Our chief, Dr. Morin, is short-handed. Two of his assistants have gone stale, and I don't wonder at it. If you'll give him a hand, he'll be grateful."

"That'll suit me. Can I live here with you?"

"Yes; you'll take Smartte's place. He paid board and lodging till the end of January. He's picking up, you say?"

"Picking up? Well, I should smile, as he would say himself. He's quite the liveliest person in Dinan. He always refers to his right leg as 'Charlie's leg,' and takes it out, rides in a carriage, and toasts it, and treats it generally as if it were the honoured member of some other body. Oh, I can tell you he gets lots of fun out of that leg."

"That's all right. I'm very glad he went, though we all missed him here. The fellows in the wards used to brighten up as soon as they set eyes on him; he was as good as a tonic."

So I resumed my rounds of the public canteens and bread-ticket offices, and my heart told itself that it was all time thrown away—that my love was lost in the mighty maze, and would never be found again; that she was dead, and that our only meeting would be in the hereafter.

It was a sad and bitter time. George de Kerhuel dropped in occasionally, and his drooping spirits were as a barometer by which I could gauge the state of the political and military atmosphere outside. He was greatly surprised at Myrtle's arrival. He questioned him keenly respecting his father and mother, and all that had happened at Kerhuel since I left, and pondered the answers with much grave consideration.

He had never come across M. le Curé yet; and always when he came in his first inquiry was, "Any news of Marie?" and his next, "Any news of that devil Lesieur?" And his usual reply to our questions as to how matters were going was a shrug of disgust, and a terse "To the devil."

"There is only one man could do us any good," he said once, "and I'm afraid it's too late even for him, and that is Vinoy. He's a man and a soldier; the others are gabblers. If Vinoy had a free hand, he wouldn't let us sit still and rot; but the others are afraid of him. It is pitiable; and, meanwhile, France is bleeding to death—bleeding white."

I remember, too, how he told us that one, General Clement Thomas, whose name I had not heard before, had been placed in command of the National Guards, and was licking them into shape with an iron hand, to their own very great disgust and discontent. "He'll do them a world of good," said George grimly, "if they don't turn on him and rend him in pieces. Trochu's afraid to hurt their feelings. Thomas stands no nonsense, and they hate him worse than the Prussians."

A few months afterwards I remembered his words.

I had worked round the nearer canteens with no better

result than I had dared to expect; for I could not hide from myself that it was chancy work at best. Even if Marie and her old attendant were in the habit of drawing their supplies from any one of those I had visited, it was quite within the bounds of possibility—nay, even of probability, since the errand was an unpleasant one—that they might not visit it every day; and, that being so, my prospects of success were infinitely reduced.

When I started out in the morning I said to myself that it was all labour in vain. When I returned dispirited, to make my rounds at the hospital, I disingenuously told myself that I had looked for no success, and so was not disappointed; but I knew that, deep down in my heart, there was always the hope that the face of either Marie or old Henriette would break suddenly upon me like a flash of heavenly light at an unexpected moment, and my sorely bruised heart would find its peace, and all would be well.

And so, day after day, I stuck doggedly to my task, and refused to be beaten. It was weary and dispiriting work, but practical experience told me that there was no royal road to success in a quest of this kind. My treasure might come suddenly to light in the most unexpected quarter, and there was nothing for it but to plod steadily on, and trust in Providence to lead me to it before it was too late. The agonies I suffered at thought of what my love might be suffering were almost unendurable.

Christmas came, and passed. We kept it vicariously, thereby approaching perhaps the more nearly to the intention of the Founder of the festival. For, in such times and circumstances, it was not possible—or, at all events, it was neither seemly nor in accordance with our feelings—to attempt any jovial celebration. I speak for myself, but I know that my dear Hugh Myrtle shared my feelings to the full. So, wearing our own particular cypress as lightly as possible, we did our best, by increased doles and added attentions, and an assumption of cheerful hope which was but skin deep, to lighten the gloom around us.

A sad and bitter time. No family gatherings, no joyful

greetings, no presents for the little ones. The tiny shoes might stand in the desolate hearths, but there were no good fairies to fill them this year. It was the Year Terrible, and those who passed it in the desolation of the beleaguered city, with the big guns booming bass, and the shrill shells screaming treble, in their most unchristian Christmas carols, will never forget it. We did our best, but even among those we could reach there were depths of suffering and agonies of loss far beyond all human efforts to mitigate or assuage.

We doubled the usual gifts to those in the hospitals, and we did our best to ensure no lack of food, for that day at all events, to those still greater sufferers with whom we were in touch outside; but the little we could do only served to impress us with the appalling amount that had to be left undone. I never want to spend another Christmas like that one.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DOVE IN A ROOKERY.

THE New Year passed, and found me apparently as near the end of my search as I was the first day I set foot in Paris; but there was no rest possible for heart or foot, and I trudged on, in a state of half-hopeless expectancy, from quarter to quarter, and from canteen to bread-bureau.

The nearer depôts had yielded nothing. I would go to the outer faubourgs and try there. When one draws a bow at a venture, it does not greatly matter into which part of the press one aims.

I saw some terrible sights in those outer districts. Women and children, barely clad, shivering in the falling sleet and snow, and showing, at last, the unmistakable signs of semi-starvation. Whole districts of them wilting visibly, like autumn flowers after the first frost of winter, rousing one's pity that they had remained so long.

One Sunday morning I went up to Montmartre—the turbulent centre of the Reds. The city had been so deadly quiet since the attempted revolution at the Hôtel de Ville that it was a novelty to find Montmartre buzzing with excitement; but then they generally were buzzing in Montmartre. It was a hive where the drones, at all events, were rarely quiet; in fact—Montmartre. But, positively, when I crossed the Rue des Dames, and made for the higher quarter there came a crowd surging along the narrow street with angry shouts and waving sticks and fists, and I stepped back into an open door to avoid being overrun.

"What is it, then?" I asked of a woman with a dirty yellow kerchief tied over her head, who came to look out.

"Mais, Monsieur, it is the bread," she said. "They have closed the bread shops before we have got our bread. It is not polite, to say the least of it. Mon dieu! It is not much we get at most, and now they would have us live on nothing.

those coquins of the Hôtel de Ville! But we shall get there all the same; but yes, nom-de-dieu!"

She was good enough to tell me where the public soup canteen was, and when the turbulent crowd had passed I went on in the opposite direction.

In front I saw a little knot of blowsy women gathered in the street, arms akimbo, vociferous. As I drew near I saw they surrounded some object on the ground. Nearer still, and I saw that it was a woman. I joined the group—great, strapping women all of them, with coarse black hair and swarthy energetic faces—to see if I could offer any assistance. I felt small beside them, but in a moment I forgot everything else.

The woman on the ground was old Henriette Dobain! Thin and worn and white, as I had never seen her in the good old days in Brittany, but old Henriette beyond a doubt; and clasped tightly in her parchmenty fingers was the broken handle of a jug.

I pushed through, and lifted her head. She was insensible.

"What has happened?" I asked, with my heart jumping furiously. "I am a doctor."

"A la bonheur!" said one. "Those noisy ones knocked the poor old thing over in their hurry, Monsieur. They meant no harm, but she got in the crowd, and she went down."

She had gone down, indeed; and further than they thought. Her face was already the colour of lead, and her hands were cold and clammy.

"She is dying," I said. "Can we take her in there?"

"Surely. The poor unfortunate! But she must have been weak to die so easily."

She was breathing heavily and with extremest labour as we bore her into the wine-shop, and her pulse was almost imperceptible. She was past all earthly help, and I knew it. Concussion of the brain to that poor, wasted, anæmic body was as fatal as a bullet through the head, and the end came very quickly.

I did what I had no right to do, what revolted my soul in the doing; but my heart was like to burst, and it forced me to it.

"Henriette! Henriette Dobain!" I cried in her ear.

"Tiens! Monsieur knows her?" said one of the by-standing viragos.

It was sheer brutality. But think! Here lay Henriette—Marie must be within arm's length somewhere, and yet in that rookery she might as well be a thousand miles away, unless I could learn from this fleeting soul exactly where she was.

"Henriette!" And in my fear I shook her by the shoulder.

"Si, si!" sputtered thickly from the white lips, as though the deep waters were already welling round them.

"Where is Mademoiselle?" I cried into her closing ear.

For one moment she opened her eyes drowsily; then she gave one great sigh, straightened her limbs along the floor, settled down into sleep, and was gone. And I bent over her, sicker at heart than if I had not seen her.

But that did not last long. Marie was in the immediate neighbourhood; in what evil case I dreaded to think. She might be sick, starving, at the very best lonely and desolate, waiting anxiously for her old servant's return with their pitiful rations; and when Henriette did not come, despair would seize her, and, yes—surely then she would come out to seek her, or to seek food for herself.

If she were able! It might be that she was too ill to move, and there she would lie and starve and die, and be heard of no more.

My heart was racked with a thousand fears, but my mind was made up not to leave the district for a single moment till I had either found her, or had no possible hope left of finding her.

"Does any one know where she lived?" I asked anxiously of the women.

"Dites donc, Joséphine," called my special lady friend

to the woman of the wine-shop, who was leaning on her elbows, looking down over the counter at Henriette, "dost thou know where the old one hung out?"

"But no, I never set eyes on the poor thing before."

"I've seen her at the canteen," said another, "but God knows where she came from."

"Monsieur knew her?" from a third.

"Yes, I knew her, and have been searching all over the city for her."

"And she goes and dies just as Monsieur finds her. Sapristi, that's rough!"

"She was in attendance on a young lady whom I am anxious to find——"

"Ah-ha!" said my virago, with a knowing nod.

"I will give five hundred francs to anyone who can find out where she is."

"Dame! Monsieur! Five hundred francs! There are gentlemen round here would cut your throat for five hundred francs."

"What art thou saying then, my little one?" said Joséphine, in a tone of righteous indignation.

"Oh, bah! Thou knowest it is true, Joséphine, and Monsieur is bien gentil, and I wish him no harm. Monsieur has been tending our wounded. Is it not so?"

"Yes, both here and in Metz," I said, anxious to create a good impression with a view to future contingencies.

"Voilà!" said my patronne. "I was sure of it."

"Take my advice, Monsieur," said the mollified Joséphine, "don't wander about here in a képi. We don't like képis in this neighbourhood, and sometimes it happens that they get cracked—crick-crack—with whatever happens to be inside them."

"I thank you, Madame; the advice is good. What about my coat? Will that pass?" It was a trooper's overcoat, with a big hood and a band at the back. I had bought it second-hand when the cold weather came.

"But yes, the coat will do. There are plenty such about, and"—with a chuckle—"they did not cost much."

"Eh bien! I must go and see what mischief my man is getting into," said my original friend. "What a nuisance the men are!"

"Well, it's you should know, Célestine. Won't you take anything to fortify yourself before you go?" And she glanced meaningly at me.

"Pardon, Mesdames! This," I said, indicating the poor old Henriette, "has made me forget my manners. Pray help yourselves at my charge."

There was no undue show of modesty on their part in accepting the invitation. *Cognac fine* was the name they gave to it when the charge was not theirs, and they would not hear of my being left out. Three times the glasses were filled, and three times clinked with mine, which was assiduously filled up and counted in, though I only sipped at it. To my surprise, however, I found it an extremely good liqueur, and said so, with a view always to propitiating mine hostess.

"And why not, Monsieur?" she asked, with a ruffle.

"It does you infinite credit, Madame. I could not get better for the hospital, and we endeavour to give them of the very best." And she was appeased.

The others wiped their mouths on their aprons, and trooped out, with friendly nods to me, and an "Eh b'en, salut!" to the lady of the house.

"Do you think I can get a messenger to go to the Salpétrière, Madame?" I asked her.

"Assuredly, Monsieur; I will find you one."

I scribbled a hasty note to Myrtle, asking him, if he could possibly so arrange his work, to come to me at once, and to come prepared to stop. I handed it to Mère Joséphine, with two francs, which she slipped into her pocket, and begged her to send it on at once.

"I am going to wait the answer here," I said.

"With pleasure, Monsieur." Then, at the inner door, she called loudly, "Alphonse, mon p'tit, here, quick!" And presently a small, grizzly, beetle-browed, black-eyed man me in. He started at sight of the body on the floor, and ked keenly at me.

"It is nothing," said the woman. "She was knocked down by the crowd. Monsieur is a doctor. Take this to the Salpétrière, and bring the answer. Quick!"

Alphonse glanced at all the little glasses on the zinc counter, and sniffed wistfully. Madame said briefly, "Afterwards!" and he went out with my letter.

"And that one down there?" inquired Madame, fixing her black eyes on me.

"Yes. What is to be done with the poor thing?"

Madame gave a non-committal shrug.

"If Monsieur says so, I will have her taken away."

"Yes. How much?"

"Shall we say twenty francs?"

"They will bury her?" I asked.

"Oh, yes; they'll bury her right enough."

"Suppose I wished to stop in the neighbourhood, Madame, where could I find a room?"

"I will accommodate Monsieur. It is not usual with me, but I am willing to make an exception in Monsieur's favour."

"That is very good of you, Madame; I will stop. Will you do me the additional favour of buying me a cap, such as you spoke of? In fact, while you are at it, will you oblige me by buying two?"

"Two caps, par exemple?"

"I have sent for a friend to come and assist me in my search."

"Ah, I see. Well, I will go and prepare the room for Monsieur. Will Monsieur have the kindness to knock on the counter if anyone comes in?" And she left Henriette Dobain and me in full charge of the premises, and disappeared into the interior.

At that time of day, however, business was slack, and my post was a sinecure. I stood in the doorway, and kept an anxious lookout along the street, in the hope that when Henriette did not return Marie might come out to search for her.

In course of time Hugh Myrtle came swinging up the street, and nearly fell over me in a blaze of excitement.

"You have found her?"

"Not yet; but she cannot be very far away, Hugh. This is poor old Henriette Dobain." And I explained how she came to be lying there.

"Poor old Joseph!" said Hugh. "He's a good old soul, though he would be the better of a muzzle at times. What's your plan, Charles?"

"Will they be able to do without you for a couple of days?"

"They'll have to. I told old Morin you wanted me, and he said he'd arrange it all right. There are very few new cases nowadays, and the rest are going on well. Now, what's the idea?"

"There is nothing for it but to watch without ceasing the places she is likely to come to for food. I could not do it singlehanded, you see."

"Right, my boy. We'll watch like a pair of cats, and we'll snap up the dear little mouse as soon as she emerges. I consider she is as good as found. How many soup places are there round here?"

"There is one just up the street; the one Henriette came to. Like old Madame Joux, however, they may have preferred not to frequent the one nearest to them. The next is in the Rue Pepin."

"You take this beat," he said, "as it is most likely Mademoiselle would come here, and I'll go up to Pepin."

"I've taken a room here, so as to have a meeting-place; and I've sent out for two Montmartre caps. Madame here says we might get our heads cracked if we wore képis, they're not the fashion here. Have you got identification papers on you, in case of trouble?"

"Never stir out without them. I've got old Cannot's certificate, and one from the Salpétrière people."

"Then as soon as we get our villains' caps we'll get to work. Suppose we meet here again at eight o'clock. I do not think Marie would venture out after that in a district like this. What on earth brought them here I cannot imagine."

A boy of sixteen or thereabouts came into the shop from the house carrying two flat caps. He wore a similar one himself, on the back of his head, with the rounded neb flat on top of it, so we wore ours in the same fashion. I am bound to say it knocked fifty per cent. off the respectability of Hugh's appearance, and I have no doubt it did the same for myself.

"Three francs," said the boy, and I handed him the money.

His left arm was inside his coat, the sleeve of which hung loose.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said curtly.

"How then, you young cub! You answer M. le Docteur like that?" asked Madame, who entered at the moment. "Good day, Monsieur," she added to Myrtle.

"How should I know he was a doctor?" growled the boy.

"Nom-de-chien, mon gars! If you answer me that way, I'll knock your head off," snorted Madame. "He's a young limb, Messieurs, and if any mischief's afoot he must be in it. He got a knife through the arm two nights ago; that's what's the matter."

"Eh b'en, my knife went into his ribs," said young hopeful.

"Little devil! You fought the day you were born, and you've never stopped since."

"Let me see the arm," said Myrtle. "Glyn, you keep your eye on the street."

The boy reluctantly displayed the wound, which a side glance showed me was dangerously red and angry.

"If you don't take care of that, my boy, you'll lose your arm," said Myrtle. "The knife was probably dirty."

"Without doubt," said the boy. "He's a dirty pig. I told him so, and he struck me. This proves it."

"If you will get me hot water, Madame, and cotton bandages I will dress it properly. Bathe it well, and renew the hot bandage every quarter of an hour till that inflammation goes down. It only needs attention."

"But Monsieur is too good," said Madame, as she hurried off to get the necessaries. "Mon dieu! What with the boys and the men, a woman's life is not worth living."

The dressing took but a few minutes. They were minutes well spent, and I could not grudge them; they won us Madame's friendship.

"What are you going to do, then, Monsieur," she asked, as she stood watching Myrtle, "about the demoiselle? How comes she to be hiding herself?"

I told her the bare fact that Marie had been sent for to nurse her brother, and since then had been lost sight of.

"Ma foi! As if there were not plenty of nurses! Was all well with her, Monsieur?"

"How do you mean, Madame? All was well with her when she left home. Since then we have no news."

"C'est ça! But why is she hiding herself? That is what I do not understand."

"At first, I have reason to believe she hid herself for fear of annoyance from a gentleman of her own district who had desired to marry her. He is dead, but she is probably not aware of that."

"I see. And you are quite sure she would wish to be found? Voyez-vous, Monsieur, as a rule when a girl hides herself she has her own very good reasons, and for me—I would respect them. But if Monsieur is quite sure——"

"I am quite sure, Madame. Mademoiselle de Kerhuel is betrothed to myself, and we love one another dearly."

"Ah, then! I will do what I can. If you attempt a search, you will get killed. You cannot go to her. You must wait till she comes out, unless I can get news of her for you. If you get into any difficulties, refer them to Mère Joséphine, of the Bonnet Rouge. I am known—ma foi, yes."

We thanked her, and went out on our quest.

All the long afternoon, with the big guns of Valérien booming heavily at intervals, I paced the dreary street in the neighbourhood of the canteen until its doors were closed; and when the night shut down, grim and grey, with slow-falling snow and a cold that tortured, I patrolled every street

that led to it, never daring to go far away, lest the oversight of a moment should lead to disaster. I do not think a single female figure appeared on any one of those streets without running the gauntlet of my anxious gaze, though, indeed, most of them were disqualified at a glance by reason of their size and shape.

When night fell my anxiety deepened, as the difficulties of my task increased. There were no lights in the streets, and in the wine-shops only feeble oil lamps which scarce sufficed to whiten the snow flakes as they dropped silently past the windows. And the women who passed now were mostly muffled against the cold, and the core of the fruit might be very different from its outer husk. Still nothing passed me which I could in any way reconcile with Marie de Kerhuel.

Intent as I was on my own quest, I could not fail to hear and see many strange things in that strange neighbourhood that afternoon. I caught snatches of strenuous conversation between dark, keen-faced men, whose eyes spoke quicker even than their tongues, as they passed me, too intent on their own business, and too secure within their own boundaries, to feel the need for any precautions; and many grim jibes I heard as to the present state of matters, and infinitely grimmer jests which kernelled many a true word concerning the times that were coming.

Tired out, and cold and hungry, I made my way back to the Bonnet Rouge at last, and met Myrtle at the doorway. He gave me a dispirited shake of the head, which I answered with another, and we went in together.

Madame's black brows questioned us as we entered the crowded shop.

"Nothing yet, Messieurs?" she asked, as we passed through her counter. "Eh b'en, courage! We shall get there in time. I am working too. A small glass of vermouth, and I will send up the soup immediately. You are starved and hungry."

The vermouth was acceptable, and the soup still more so; perhaps our empty stomachs had something to do with it.

The ragout that followed was excellently made, whatever its basis, and we ate and asked no questions. Below, the wine-shop rumbled like a volcano through the thin crust of the flooring. Later on, as we know, the volcano burst forth in flames and fury, and turned Paris into a charnel house, and deluged it with fire. Had Pietri still reigned at the Préfecture, his wolves in sheep's clothing would doubtless have had many strange stories to take to their master, and the chances are that those strange stories would never have hatched out into deeds; but Keratry's sheep, clothed in authority though they might be, stuck mostly to the inner boulevards, and looked upon Montmartre as an unhealthy district for their labours.

Myrtle had had much the same experiences as myself. "It's a deuce of a hole-and-corner place, is this," he said over dinner "and they all seem mighty busy at something. Mischief of some kind, I should say, by the looks of them."

But we were both too tired for much talk, and after a smoke we rolled ourselves up in our cloaks and the coverlet of the bed and slept like tops; and in the morning we rumpled the bed till it looked as if it had been slept in, for fear of wounding Madame's feelings.

That day passed like the last—in ceaseless watchings for one who never came, than which no more depressing task is possible to man. And my heart sank ever lower and lower, so that towards night I came near dreading what it would be we should find, if we found her at all. Still, in doubt there is always room for hope; it is your certainty that makes or mars.

A woman sped past me as I turned my steps wearily towards the wine-shop. She was young and lithe, and went swiftly over the snow. I had not seen her face as she came up behind me. I followed her. She turned into Mère Joséphine's, and I went in too. She was leaning over the counter speaking eagerly with Madame, and the moment I entered Madame raised her finger, and her gleaming, red-black face had a halo in it and round it. The face of an

angel shone through it and refined it suddenly, and her fiery eyes glowed with a new, soft light.

"Enfin, mon cher," she said. "We have found her. Courage, Monsieur! And—a little glass of cognac fine." It was in my hand as she spoke.

"How? Where?" I gasped, for the sudden realisation of all my longings shook me.

But Madame was already busied on my behalf. She went into the back room, and returned in a moment.

"Attention, Monsieur! She is ill and starving. Lizette will take you to her. Here is warm soup"—she had it in a tin can—"bread, a bottle of cognac, a spoon; feed her slowly, you understand. Tenez! A candle also. Now go, and God bless you! Lizette, thou hast done well, my girl. I will send the other gentleman after you. No. 45, didst say, Lizette? B'en! Allez—vite!" And Lizette and I sped away up the street, and round the corner, and along till we came to No. 45 in another street, and Lizette led the way up the gloomy staircase.

"Wait one moment, Monsieur," she said, as we panted on a high landing, which opened with unglazed windows into the well of the house; "I will announce you."

She stopped, and lit the candle. Then she tapped on a dark door and went in. She was back in a moment, and beckoned me in.

Down in my heart was the fear lest it should all be a mistake. It seemed to me almost too good to be true. Was Marie really here—after all these months of anxiety and searching?

But one look at the sweet face on the pillow under the dingy white tilt of the bed was enough, and I was down on my knees by her side, and she was striving to raise herself on her elbow. The white sleeve fell back, showing her white arm, transparently thin and blue-veined. Her long, bright hair fell all about her, as though she had not had strength to coil it. Her white neck rose slenderly out of her white gown, which hung loosely. The sweet face had lost its rounded softness, and had a chiselled, sharpened look about it, with

haunting hollows in the flickering light. She was like a frail, white lily, drooping for lack of nourishment.

"Marie!" My heart was full to bursting—with love, and gratitude, and pain—but I could say no more.

"My beloved!" she said softly. "God be thanked! I greatly desired to see you once again." And then she sank back, faint and white.

I poured a few drops of cognac into the spoon, and dropped them between the pale lips. She opened her eyes and smiled faintly. I put my arm round her, and raised her.

"Here is soup, dearest," I said; "you are starving. Lizette, just one spoonful to begin with." And Marie swallowed it eagerly.

"Now a crumb of bread, and another spoonful of soup; and now two drops of cognac—— More soup? You shall have all you can take, dearest; but we must go slowly. All is well now that I have found you. You shall have everything you want, and I shall not leave you again."

She drank soup, and ate crumbs of bread as fast as I would give them to her; and it seemed to me, though it may only have been my own wistful fancy, that I could feel the new life growing in her, and throbbing against my arm that was round her.

Lizette had stood at one side, doling drops of brandy and soup into the spoon as I held it out, and regarding us with vast enjoyment. She was a bright-eyed, dark creature, with all the natural vivacity which the privations of the siege had left to her doubled for the moment by the business she was engaged upon.

"Nom-de-dieu!" she said. "It is as good as a feuilleton in the *P'tit Journal!*" And could evidently get no higher than that.

The room was very bare, and very cold. There were sparse, white ashes on the hearthstone; the fire had died probably very soon after old Henriette, who lighted it. The bed and a table and three rush-bottomed chairs and a few dishes completed the furniture.

I thought I felt a shiver in the slight body inside my arm. I drew it out for a moment, and slipped off my trooper's coat, which never looked to rise to so high a dignity, and placed it over her shoulders.

"We must have a fire," I said, for I saw it would be quite impossible to move her that night. "Can you light one, Lizette?"

But before she could answer there came a tap on the door, and Lizette flew guardingly to it, and I heard Myrtle's voice.

"Are you here, Glyn? Is all well?"

"Come in, Hugh. Here she is, all safe and sound, drinking soup and cognac like a trooper."

He came in hesitatingly, and Marie gave him a thin little hand, which he raised to his lips in true French fashion, and I am quite sure because he did not dare to shake it lest it should break.

"I never was so glad of anything in all my life," he said. "This is some more hot soup Madame gave me. She will come along herself as soon as she closes the shop. She says if she comes now Alphonse and the rest will drink the place to pieces, and business is business after all."

At which Lizette grinned, as though the little failings of M. Alphonse and his friends were not unknown to her.

"We want a fire, Hugh. See if you and Lizette can manage one between you."

Lizette looked quietly in the places where instinct told her wood was likely to be found.

"I'm afraid there is none," Marie said quietly. "My poor Henriette went out to try and get a little; but she never came back, and I fear she is dead."

"These chairs will burn famously," said Myrtle, "and they're easily paid for." And he had a chair in pieces, and piled scientifically above its rush bottom on the hearth in no time, and the quick flames leaped up, and the room looked homelier at once.

"Those other chairs and the table will keep us going all night if necessary," he said cheerfully.

"And to-morrow we'll get a carriage, and take you away to the Lion d'Or," I said; "and Madame and Lotte will delight to nurse you back to life again."

She smiled on us all, but she had very little to say. It was days before I knew all the horrors she had suffered lying there, alone, famished and thirsty, in the dark and cold—waiting only for death, which seemed so slow of coming. She had had nothing to eat or drink for thirty hours before we found her. A little while longer, and we should only have found what I had feared to think of; but, thank God and Lizette Callé's good-hearted pertinacity, that last tragic possibility had been spared us.

Certain women of the neighbourhood—at the instigation of Madame of the Bonnet Rouge, who bore great weight among them, by reason of her position, and her sharp tongue, and her physical strength—had started on a house-to-house search, such as would have been utterly impossible for us. And so it came about that Marie, lying patiently in darkness and misery, was suddenly startled by the opening of the door of her room, and Lizette Callé's quick, "Is there anyone here?" And when Marie had answered her, she was astounded by the girl's next question, "Are you Ma'm'selle de Kerhuel?" Her reply to which sent Lizette flying down the black stairs, while Marie lay waiting in terror lest it should be Raoul de Querhoal who had succeeded in tracing her; but, in truth, so far spent that she cared little, since little worse could befall her.

And now a heavy foot came up the stair, and with a tap on the door Madame Mère Joséphine, of the Bonnet Rouge, came in, with the face of a beneficent Juno, and stood beaming upon us all.

"So there you are, my little one, and a pretty bird, too," she said, eyeing Marie with a keen and critical, but withal kindly, look. "And now it is all right, and the past is past and all you have to do is to eat and get strong again. But, truly, Monsieur, I am glad to have had my finger in this pie · it will tell to my credit up above."

"And down below too, I hope, Madame," I said grate

fully. "You and Ma'm'selle Lizette have made me your debtors for life."

"Ta-ta! I liked the look of Monsieur as soon as I set eyes on him," said Madame; "and Lizette has done well, and doubtless she will reap her reward."

"That she will," I said, never ceasing, through all this talk, to feed my love with soup and bread and an occasional two drops of the cognac; "but my gratitude to you both will go deeper than anything I can do for you."

"It is natural," said Madame assentingly. "Now, will Monsieur leave us Ma'm'selle to nurse back into life again?"

"No, dear Madame, not that. I do not want Ma'm'selle ever to go out of my sight again, and my work is down there. I shall take her to-morrow to the Lion d'Or, where I can watch over her."

"By the Horse Market? I know it; a good house, and Madame is a famous cook when she cares to put her hand to it. Well, well, no doubt she will be better there, and one cannot wonder at Monsieur desiring to take no further risks in these times. Now, for to-night? You two cannot stop here in Ma'm'selle's room."

"Then, for me, I sit outside the door," I said; and Lizette flashed a smile of appreciation.

"After all, we are doctors, Madame," I urged.

"Yes, yes; but all the same——" she said, and looked at us as a house-master might regard a couple of his juvenile pupils who had told him they had made up their minds to have a midnight orgie in his private study. "It is not quite the thing, you know; and, besides, it will embarrass Ma'm'selle."

"Then we'll sit on the stairs," I said.

"Perhaps there is another room," suggested Myrtle, to whom, possibly, the stairs outside Marie's room did not seem quite so much like the stairs of heaven as they did to me.

"Voyons! Lizette, my child, learn at once if there is any place where these gentlemen can wait till morning; and say that Madame Joséphine, of the Bonnet Rouge, requests it." And Lizette sped away.

"I would stop with Ma'm'selle myself," said Madame, "but things go to rack and ruin when I am not there. My goodman is not a man of business, unfortunately, you see."

"We have trespassed too much on your goodness already, Madame, and you have done great things for us."

"The thought of it repays me, Monsieur," said Madame, magnificently. "Eh b'en, Lizette, what hast thou?"

"The room next to this is empty," said Lizette. "Here is the key; also the rooms below."

"One will be enough," said Madame. "I'll be bound Messieurs will not quarrel. Let us see what it is like. Canst thou stop all night with Ma'm'selle, Lizette?"

"But yes, assuredly," said Lizette, with a vehemence that betokened surprise that Madame should ever for a moment have imagined that anything less was her intention.

"I will send you more soup. Could you eat anything else, ma chérie?"

"It is the best soup I ever tasted, Madame," said Marie, with a wan smile, "and it strengthens me."

"Then more soup, and I think a little wine, Monsieur, slightly warmed, and then Ma'm'selle will sleep, and the morning will find her much recovered. Now let us see this other room; and, Lizette, you will come and bring back the soup and the wine and some pieces of wood. If you burn all Mère Colignot's chairs she will have a fit."

"Ma'm'selle Lizette has done quite enough running about for one night," said Myrtle; "Madame will permit me to accompany her, and bring back the things."

"Monsieur is very amiable," said Madame and Lizette in a breath, and they all went out to examine the empty room. And I pressed my love to my heart, and kissed her eyes and lips and neck, till a tiny flush waved over her face, and she put up faint, protesting hands, but smiled all the same in great content and happiness.

"You will not leave me, Charles?" she whispered.

"Never again, dearest, as long as life lasts us," I said vehemently; whereat she smiled again with a touch of amusement. But I had gone further in my views of the immediate

future than she had, and it was my intention to marry her the very next day if in any way it could be compassed.

"God has been good to us," she whispered. "I prayed, oh so earnestly, my dear, and He has heard and answered me."

"We will thank Him all our lives, dearest, for His goodness to us this day, and we will never part again."

She pressed my hand, and lay back on the pillow sleepily.

Nevertheless, in spite of the boldness of my promise, time came when we were once more separated, and one of us hung on the knife edge of death, and escaped by a very hair's breadth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HASTE TO THE WEDDING.

MARIE slept soundly, and Lizette's office, except from Madame's high moral standpoint, was no great burden to her. Twice during the night she succeeded in giving our patient a few spoonfuls of soup and sips of warmed wine, and the morning found her decidedly improved, though still very weak.

Myrtle and I took possession of the empty room alongside. There was not a stick in it until we lighted our fire, but we sat contentedly on the floor, with our backs against the side of the fireplace, and for myself that bare room was filled and furnished as no king's palace ever was before. For when a man's heart is almost bursting with gladness the outward accidents of chairs and tables are of very small account indeed.

Myrtle, with the providence of a six months' campaigner, had brought back from the Bonnet Rouge a concoction which he said Madame called "ponch," and a coffee-pot to warm it in. When we set the tin pot in the ashes, it distilled ambrosial odours throughout the empty room. When we sipped it, it set the blood tingling in our veins; and with it and our pipes, and the amplitude of our thoughts, we knew neither cold nor crawling hours.

As soon as daylight came, Myrtle set off for the Lion d'Or, to prepare them for our arrival, and to return as soon as possible with a carriage.

When I tapped on the door of the next room, Lizette, somewhat tired with her vigil, but still sparkling valiantly, opened it cautiously, and informed me that Ma'm'selle had slept beautifully, and was sleeping still. My heart, which had starved so long, craved the sight of her, and I went inside and stood looking down at her—the most beautiful sight in all the world. More than ever, in the cold, white light of the January dawn, she looked like the marble effigy of a

saint or a Christian martyr, with the slightly hollowed cheeks, and the sweetly curving lips, and the meekly lowered veils between herself and the world. So marble white she looked in that spectral glimmer that, for a moment, my heart chilled with the thought that, after all, she had slipped away in the night, and that I had found her only to lose her; and then, as I gazed at her, the dark eyes, in the dark hollows which made them look larger than ever, opened slowly, and she lay still, looking up at me without speaking. I bent and kissed her, and the marble flushed with rosy life, and she whispered, "My dear, my dear; I feared it was only a dream."

"It is the most beautiful dream that ever was, my love, and we are never going to waken from it again."

I fed her with soup and bread, and then left them while Lizette helped her to dress.

I made up twenty-five napoleons into a little roll, and inscribed my mother's address and Madame de Kerhuel's inside it, and when Lizette came out to tell me that Ma'm'selle was ready I put the packet into her hand, and shook it heartily once more and said:

"That is the money I promised to anyone who would find Ma'm'selle for me, Lizette. You will find two addresses inside; if at any time there is any way in which we can be of assistance to you, write to either address, and you will find friends there. You have done me the very greatest service one person can do for another."

"I am very, very glad, Monsieur. Ma'm'selle is an angel. She will be quite happy now. What horror if we had not found her!"

"Indeed, yes; one cannot think of it. Will you tell Madame, Lizette, that I will return to-morrow and settle up for everything. She knows how grateful I am for all her kindness also."

Presently Myrtle and the carriage arrived, and we carried our frail lily down the dark stairs, well muffled in the blankets he had had the forethought to bring. Valérien boomed a dull salute on the frosty air as we drove slowly

away down the snowy street. So that dark page in our lives was turned and done with, and, though the iron girdle was still tight round us, the future was full of golden lights and hopes.

There is no warmer welcome in the world—outwardly at all events—than a middle-class Frenchwoman's when her heart is touched; and the welcome accorded to Marie by Madame of the Lion d'Or and Lotte, her handmaid, fulfilled to the fullest this high encomium.

They were waiting under the archway when we drove up, with such a fusillade from the whip that the neighbours rushed out in the belief that the Prussians had broken in, and the last hour was come. They fluttered about us with little congratulatory chirpings and twitterings as we carried her carefully upstairs to the room they had prepared for her, where a great fire roared up the chimney, with a rollicking, damn-the-expense air which carried us clear away from beleaguered Paris, and back to the woody lands of Brittany. There was an old-fashioned, chintz-covered couch drawn out by the side of the fire, and Marie flatly refused to go to bed, but elected to lie on the couch instead.

The nourishing food—and whatever Madame Joséphine's soup was made of, it was beyond question tasty and nourishing—and the relief of mind and body, the slackening of the tension, and the knowledge that all she had to do was to leave herself in our willing hands, had already wrought a great change in her, and brought her back to a shadowy resemblance of her former self. It needed only rest and food to complete the cure, and these were hers for the taking.

Madame and Lotte seemed to be bringing in some tasty dish every few minutes all day long as I sat by her couch. There was evidently to be no doubt about Mademoiselle's speedy recovery if it depended on the tempting of her appetite. Before ever they set eyes on herself they had known of my anxious search for her, in which their "cher Monsieur Smartte" had also interested himself. They knew that Captain George of the gloomy countenance was her brother, and they ascribed his sombreness to anxiety on his sister's

account—which did not account for it at all—and they liked us all, and rejoiced now in our happiness.

Marie and Myrtle and I had coffee and milk and rolls together; and then he hurried off to the hospital, and I promised to make my rounds later, when he could bear Marie company.

So I sat by the old couch, holding and caressing the thin, white, little hand in mine, and proceeded to unfold my great plan.

"As soon as Myrtle comes back, I shall run over to the Louvre and try to get hold of George, Marie."

"George!" she said with a start. "Is he——? Oh, Charles, they told me he had died."

It was no good cursing the dead, even mentally, so I made shift to answer quietly, "No, dear, he is alive and well, and has never received a scratch, though he has been in the thick of the fighting, and has borne himself gallantly. They gave him his commission for what he did at Choisy, and now he is captain."

"Dear George! That is so strange to think of. His own wishes were so very different."

"Yes, this terrible war has altered many things. Raoul de Querhoal is dead. I saw him fall as he led on his men."

I said it purposely to lead her to speak of all that had befallen her, for I believed it would relieve her mind to talk of it, and I had much to tell her which I dared not yet broach to her.

"I cannot feel sorry," she said simply. "He was a bad man. The telegram that came, asking me to come and nurse George, was sent by M. de Querhoal. He was at the address that was given in it when we got there. He said George had had to be removed, and he would take us to him at once. I mistrusted him, but I did not know what else to do. He took us in a carriage to a house some distance away. He said George was upstairs, and we followed him up to a room at the back. He left us there, and after we had waited some time I got anxious, and tried the door and found it was locked."

"The scoundrel!" I said. "However, he is dead."

"He kept us locked up all day, and we were very miserable. The window looked out on to a large garden; there was no one about, and we could do nothing."

Here there came a discreet tap on the door, and Lotte came fluttering noiselessly in with a tiny bowl of milk-white soup, with whose quality I was already acquainted, and stood over Marie till the last drop was finished.

"It is delicious, Lotte. Pray thank Madame for her kindness," said Marie.

"Madame is already thanked, Ma'm'selle," said Lotte gracefully, and retired.

"When Raoul came in at last," Marie resumed, "he told me plainly that George was dead, and that he intended to keep me there till I promised to marry him. I told him I would never marry him if he kept me there till I died, and begged him to let me go. He said I would probably think better of it when I had been there a week. I reminded him that he could not marry me without my mother's consent. He said she also would probably think better of it when she learned that I had been there for a week. Henriette burst out on him, but he only laughed at all we said. An old woman brought us food, and he came up at odd times through the next few days to see how we were getting on."

"Did you see anything of M. le Curé?" I asked.

"M. Lesieur? No. Why?"

"He was living in the house you went to first when I got there—the house named in the telegram."

"M. Lesieur! Why, what could he be doing there?"

"I can only imagine, dearest; and my idea is that he and Raoul had plotted this thing between them, and that Raoul then threw the curé over, and tried to play the hand out himself. Well, and then?"

"Then the days passed, and he came no more, and the old woman was at her wits' end to know what to do with us. We were frantic to get out; and one night, when she brought our dinner in, we jumped on her, and threw her down, and took her keys, and got away. It was quite simple as long as

we knew that Raoul was not down below. We hurried away, leaving all our things behind; and we walked and walked, not knowing where we were going, or, indeed, where to go. We saw a notice of a furnished room to let in that house where you found me, and we took it, and it was like heaven to be free again.

"We had only a small amount of money, and had to economise. Dear old Henriette did everything, for the anxiety had made me ill. We could not buy very much food, and we suffered greatly from the cold. Henriette went to the public soup places, and got tickets for bread, and we managed to keep alive. Then, one day, she went out and never came back; and it was dreadful alone in the dark, with no fire and nothing to eat. I felt very weak and ill, and I was afraid all the time that someone would come up; but there seemed almost no one in the house, and no one came, and I began to wish someone would come, for I was afraid I would starve to death. I tried to get up and dress to go out for food, but it was too much for me; and I lay through a day and a night, and another whole day, wishing I could die."

Another discreet tap, and Lotte entered again, bringing this time some delicate slices of white meat on a plate, with bread sauce, and rich gravy, and a tiny slice of bread.

"Lotte, you will kill me with kindness; you are all too good," said Marie.

"Not possible," beamed Lotte. "If Ma'm'selle's life depended on me, it would be very long, and very happy. Monsieur"—sternly to me—"Madame says you are not to weary Ma'm'selle by talking too much to her."

"But I am not talking, Lotte. I've hardly opened my mouth."

"But, mon dieu! Then that is worse still; you are making Ma'm'selle talk, and Madame says you are not to do so."

"All right, Lotte; we'll be as quiet as mice." And with a reprehensive shake of the finger Lotte withdrew to concoct further dainties with Madame.

"The pains of hunger were dreadful the first night," said Marie, continuing, "but they passed away, and only came back at times afterwards; and I lay half asleep, thinking of you and my mother and Kerhuel, and my dear Jean and George both gone, and that I would soon be with them. And at first I prayed that I might see you once again, though I did not see how it could be, for I did not know you were in Paris; and then I prayed that those dreadful pains might not come again, and that my passing might be easy. And then that dear Lizette came in, as I told you; and then I saw you standing there in the candle-light, and I thought it was a dream."

"The dream that is to last for ever, dearest. And now we will put all the black time behind us for ever and ever, and think only of the future. Do you know what I am going to do when I see George?"

"Bring him quickly to see me!"

"That, of course; but very much more. I am going to take no more risks with this elusive little body; I am going to marry you out of hand—to-day if possible."

"Oh, Charles!"

"Oh, Marie! Yes, my sweet; once married, neither Mrs. Grundy nor Madame Joséphine can keep my eye off you. I have thought it all out carefully, and I am sure it is the very best thing to do."

"But—can we?"

"Who is to hinder? I have your mother's consent, and George will represent her. He will wish it, I know. He has been furious at the thought of Raoul's trickery. He would have sought him out and killed him, but that he was already dead. I will also see M. Dellieu, M. Renel's friend, and he will tell me how to set about it. Everything is in chaos here just now, and I think there will be no difficulty—unless you object."

For answer she put her hand trustfully into mine.

Myrtle came in soon afterwards with good reports of all our patients.

"They keep on asking after you all the time," he said.

"I expect it's the chocolates and cigarettes they are anxious about."

"Not in all cases. That boy you hooked out of the quarry —Lepine—he's quite in the dumps at seeing nothing of you; and most of the others, I think, go deeper than chocolates and cigarettes. It would do them all good if you could take a skim through."

"I'll go there first. They've been on my conscience, but no man ever had better reason for neglecting his duties."

"That's so," said Myrtle, with an appreciative glance at the sofa and its occupant. "It does one good to see you looking so much better, Ma'm'selle Marie."

"You are all very good to me," smiled Marie.

"Not half so good as we'd like to be," said Myrtle gallantly.

"We're going to have a wedding here, Hugh; to-day if possible. If you could get some more of that brown stuff off your face, I'd ask you to be best man."

"No! Really? That's splendid! I'll take the skin off if necessary."

"We won't go so far as to require any sacrifice of cuticle; but if you'll stop here till I come back, I'll away and get things arranged. And, I say, Hugh, just try and keep Madame and Lotte within reasonable bounds. They're just cramming her with good things. Eat some of them yourself, and say that Mademoiselle enjoyed them exceedingly."

"All right, my boy, I'll see to it. You cut away and complete those arrangements, and don't forget the boys in the hospital."

The boys were really glad to see me for myself, quite apart, I am sure, from what I took to them. They greeted my reappearance with cries of, "Enfin, Monsieur!" "A la bonheur!" "We feared you were dead!" "Welcome, Monsieur!" and so on.

Young Lepine chided me gently for my lapse.

"We miss you, Monsieur," he said, "and life is not of the most jovial here. We cannot afford to do without one

pleasure. This is my father, Monsieur. He desires to thank you for all your goodness to me."

Lepine père was a grave-faced man of fifty or so, still wearing an official-looking grizzled moustache and imperial.

"But, indeed, Monsieur, I know not how to thank you; and his mother says the same. Monsieur's name is written deep on our hearts, I assure him."

"I but did my duty, M. Lepine; but I am truly glad it saved you so great a loss. The boy will be whole and fit in a couple of months. I am rather proud of that leg, you know; but he has a good, sound constitution, and that was half the battle."

"He got that from me," said the father gravely; "I am thankful it has served him well. When can I take him home, Monsieur?"

"Oh, we can't spare him yet; and you must not take any unnecessary risks with that leg. It would be a grievous pity if we lost it, after all, through a little impatience. Besides, he is quite comfortable here, n'est ce pas, mon beau?"

"But yes," said the young fellow; "but all the same I would like well to see the old lady. Dame, yes!"

I went the rounds with a cheery word and something else to each, and had a short chat with Dr. Morin, to whom I confided my good fortune, and received his hearty congratulations. He also favoured me with the rather scathing opinion—for he was a member of the old régime, and regarded the new state of matters with much disfavour—that at the present time I would not experience the slightest official difficulty in marrying half a dozen wives if I wanted to. I assured him my aspirations went no further than one, and sped away to the Louvre to find George.

I was so fortunate as to get him on duty. He had me admitted to the courtyard, and we strolled up and down while we talked.

"You have news?" he said. "I see it in your face."

"Yes, good news." And I told him how we had found Marie.

"Thank God it is no worse!" he said, when I had done. "I will run round and see her as soon as I am free here."

"She is hungering for a sight of you. Now, the next thing is this, George. I want to have the fullest right to look after her all the time. It will be best that we get married at once—to-day. What do you say?"

"Yes!" he said promptly. "Jean desired it, the mother desires it, and that devil of a curé does not desire it; therefore it must be right. Yes, Charles, marry her at once. Poor child, she has suffered, and for me."

"Then I will go at once to M. Dellieu and beg his assistance. Can you not join us at dinner? You will represent your mother, and can speak for her."

"Yes; I will arrange it."

"I have said nothing to Marie about your father, and, of course, nothing about Raoul's death beyond the fact that he *is* dead. You understand, she is much run down; the less disturbing news the better."

"I quite understand. I will be there all right."

"Any news? Are we any nearer the end?"

"Just the number of days since I saw you last. It is inevitable. They are all at sixes and sevens, and each for himself, except Vinoy, and they won't give him his hand. Old Thomas is manhandling the Nationals till they don't know which are their heads and which their heels; but it's all too late to be of any use. How are they feeling about things in Montmartre?"

"Streets quiet, wine-shops full, and a great deal of strenuous talking going on."

"Yes, they'll bubble over when the chance comes; and at present it's nobody's business to bottle them up. Maybe we'll have to call in the Prussians to wipe them out," he said grimly. "And, by the way, Charles, the sooner you find new quarters the better. It's hardly safe where you are at present."

"What's wrong?"

"The Prussians are shelling the bastions on that side, and their shells have been coming in pretty freely."

"Surely they won't reach as far as our place?"

"I saw one fall in the Rue d'Enfer this morning, and blow a man and woman to pieces."

"That's getting pretty close. Where can we get to be out of it?"

"Anywhere this side of the river between the Western Station and the Place de la Bastille will be safe, I think. I should find another place if I were you."

"Is it a cut-and-dried bombardment, or only accidentals that pitch high and come over by mistake?"

"We've had no notice of bombardment, so it may be only accidentals; but if one hits you the result's about the same. If you take my advice, you'll move."

I went thoughtfully on to M. Dellieu's. He was out. I waited till he came in. He was delighted at my news, and saw no difficulties in the way.

"Everything's upside down," he said, "but we will do things in as orderly a fashion as the times permit. I will find out the registrar of your district, and get him to come with me. We will have the marriage properly entered, and if there are any little irregularities you must correct them afterwards. Now you want to get back to Mademoiselle; I will be there as soon as possible. If I am too soon, you shall give me something to eat." And away I sped through the gloomy streets, first to a certain shop in the Rue de la Paix, and then back to my dear one, the happiest man in Paris that day. And cold and misery, and hunger and desolation, and even possible shells from the Prussian batteries, were not to me that day, for my heart was all aflame with the thought of her who awaited me in the little hotel by the Horse Market, and whose life, by God's great mercy and her own sweet will, was at last to be joined to mine.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE UNINVITED GUEST.

We were in the tight grip of the iron girdle, you must remember. Fuel was becoming scarce, genuine delicacies were out of the question, but there was no braver show in all Paris than our room in the Lion d'Or made that January afternoon.

It was a bitterly cold day outside; but, inside, the fire roared up the chimney as if all the trees that had disappeared from the Bois de Boulogne and the Tuileries Gardens lay waiting in Madame's cellars to feed its majesty. And, as for delicacies—if you had the common-sense to eat in confidence, and judge only by the gratification of your sense of taste, and to put an absolute stopper on your imagination as to the possible source and origin of some of Madame's creations—you found yourself, metaphorically speaking, in clover. With a truly Parisian perception of the fitness of things and of the requirements of the moment, Madame had spread a table at one side of the room with tempting little cold dishes, as a foretaste of joys to come. For at that time, when hunger was the rule and satisfaction the exception, no higher honour could one proffer to a guest than the offer of something to eat. If it was something out of the common, and therefore remotely reminiscent of former times, the greater the honour.

And, if you were wise, you spoke little, but applied yourself to the dishes on the table, and confined your discussion of them to silent and toothsome enjoyment; and marvelled much, and thanked your stars, and wished for a wedding every day in the week.

That, I think, was at all events the state of mind of little M. Chalrois, the official whom M. Dellieu had raked out from his hiding-place and brought with him.

Difficulties! and in view of such a feast as the well-set table at the end of the room forecasted! "Dieu-de-dieu, Mes-

sieurs! There are no difficulties! Not to be thought of for a moment. Ma foi! If Monsieur would have the complaisance to change his name each time, I would marry him every day in the week, and to a fresh demoiselle each time."

I hinted that it might, perhaps, be as well not to say as much to Mademoiselle; and he winked knowingly at me, and helped himself to a second glass of vermouth as an additional appetiser where none at all was needed, and pecked away at the dainty little dishes in a nonchalant and absent-minded fashion which could not hide his eagerness, and was infinitely diverting.

M. Dellieu had already found favour in Marie's sight, as being a friend of her dear friend M. Renel, who proved a strong bond between them and a fruitful source of conversation.

Madame and Lotte fluttered in and out as was their wont, and regretted a thousand times that their dear M. Smartte was not there to add to their enjoyment. Between them they had, with Parisian deftness, arrayed Marie for her bridal in white robes and filmy laces. Where they came from, heaven only knows; but they were a source of infinite satisfaction to the women-folk, and of wondering admiration to the men.

In spite of her hollowed cheeks and pale siege-face, my darling looked lovely beyond compare, and my whole heart went out to her with infinite longing; and now, at last, the desire to cherish and comfort her, and to surround her with all those loving offices in which my whole being would find its highest delight, was about to be accomplished. A few minutes more, and we two would be made one, never to part again till one of us passed on in front to the land where partings are no more.

We waited only for George; and M. Chalrois stated, with very definite emphasis, and with a hungry look at the table, that if he did not come—nom-de-dieu! What matter? We would go ahead without him. It was not a little thing like that that in times such as these should be allowed to hinder the consummation of one's hopes. Not at all! And he

helped himself, with an air of forgetfulness, to a third glass of vermouth and a further supply of eatables.

Fearing the effects of too much of even so mild a stimulant as vermouth on a temporarily unaccustomed stomach, I endeavoured to lead him into a political discussion, but I could not get him far from the table.

"Afterwards, possibly, Monsieur," he said, with one eye on the board, as if he feared it might vanish. "It is well to devote oneself entirely, body and soul, to the business of the moment. Those, like yourself, and Trochu, and the rest, who can still revel in luxuries, cannot possibly view things from the standpoint of us others, whose bodies and souls are slowly disintegrating from sheer lack of the necessaries of life. It is simple foolishness standing out in the cold this way. It is magnificent, no doubt, as all the world says; but, mon dieu! there is reason in all things. Can they not be satisfied with making heroes of us? Is it necessary that we should also become martyrs?"

I hinted gravely that the two were frequently first cousins.

"A hero who, purely for the sake of posing, makes himself a martyr is a fool," he said with a shrug. "Trochu is a poseur. He seeks to make himself hero by making other people martyrs. Does he suffer as we others? Not at all. Put him in the trenches, with black bread to live on, and he would sign that capitulation inside a week; and then we would strike a balance, and pay our debts, and the world would start again. Enfin, here comes Monsieur at last. A la bonheur! Now we can get to work!" And he buttoned up his spare frock coat as one who girds himself for the fray.

The greeting between brother and sister was of the warmest, but I could see how struck Marie was by the change that had come over him.

"I should hardly have known you, George," she said. "You are changed and aged. You are ten years older since I saw you last."

"More than that," he said. "One ages fast in times like these. Each battle is like going to one's grave, each return is a resurrection. One lives many lives."

"You have been very fortunate, George; I pray that you may escape."

"Yes," he said; "that is very good of you, dear. If your prayers are heard, it will be well for me. If not—still well."

"You approve our marrying at once, George?" she asked.

"Absolutely, my child. It is the very best thing to do. We all desire it, and Charles will take care of you as no one else can. I was telling him this morning he must not keep you here. Charles, my friend, they are moving the wounded from the Luxembourg because of the shells. Unless I am very much mistaken, you are well within range of both Clamart and Bourg la Reine, and they seem to be getting impatient out there."

"Comment, Monsieur!" cried Madame in great alarm. "You think we are in danger here?"

"I fear so, dear Madame. Shells fell in the Luxembourg Gardens this morning, and so the wounded are being removed. If it is not safe for them, it is not safe for you."

"Mon dieu! Mon dieu! What shall we do? Oh, those cursed Prussians!"

"Eh bien, Mesdames et Messieurs," broke in the little registrar, with a businesslike impatience which refused to be veiled; "if we are all here, shall we proceed? Business first, pleasure afterwards. Will Monsieur have the goodness to take his place by the side of Mademoiselle? Comme ça!"

I took my stand by Marie's couch, and the rest stood round us. I can see them all. George de Kerhuel, grim-faced and sombre, at Marie's other side, and Hugh Myrtle, smiling, at mine. In front of us stood little M. Chalrois, tightly buttoned up in his seedy frock coat, grizzled and eager. Alongside him stood M. Dellieu, an incipient benediction in his face as he looked at us. Behind them, Madame and Lotte, in their Sunday best, much sprucer than any of the men folk, whose clothes all showed outward and visible signs of wear and tear and general dilapidation. Behind them, again, just inside the doorway, Madame's two other maids, whom Eve-like curiosity and feminine instinct had alike called to the wedding. The windows in front showed the bleak, grey weather. The dancing flames glowed rosily

on us all, and flashed on the gold bands on George's right cuff, and winked merrily back at us from the dishes and bottles on the table.

"Married persons," said little M. Chalrois, in the level tones of one who repeats a necessary formula, and wants to get through with it as quickly as possible, "owe to each other fidelity, succour, assistance."

Exactly the debts I was desirous of paying to Marie. I wondered why he wasted time telling me so.

"The husband owes protection to his wife," said M. Chalrois; "the wife obedience to her husband."

We made no objection to these trite observations.

"The wife is obliged to live with her husband, and to follow him to every place where he may find it convenient to reside; the husband is obliged to receive her, and to furnish her with everything necessary for the wants of life, according to his means and station."

Would it not be the highest delight of my life to provide for this dear girl's every need according to my means and station?

"Do you, M. de Kerhuel, on your mother's behalf, consent to the marriage of Mdlle. Marie de Kerhuel, your sister, with M. Charles Glyn, here present?"

But his question was never answered.

Placed as I was, I looked straight at the two windows before me; and suddenly the room shook, and the wall between the windows burst raggedly inwards—paper, plaster, lath, and bricks—as though under the blow of a mighty hammer. I saw the point of the deadly thing coming through, and as I flung myself on top of my dear one on the couch a blasting crash filled all the room, and I sickened, as a white-hot chisel seemed to sear through the flesh of my back from flank to shoulder.

I raised myself with a sob, and looked down at Marie. She had fainted, and lay still and white. The air was thick with smoke and the smell of sulphur.

"Are you hurt?" I heard Myrtle ask. "Is she safe?"

Behind me, as I hung unsteadily searching Marie's form for sign of wound, was moaning and the terrified screaming

of women. Pieces of the walls and ceiling came pattering down; there was a smell of burning.

"She has fainted," I managed to say; "not hit, I think. You?"

"Not a scratch, thanks to you and the sofa."

The room was a horror—a nightmare—a thing never to be effaced from one's memory as long as life lasts.

The windows were gone, and the cold air was driving the powder smoke in ghostly wreaths and whorls; the fire had been blown out of the hearth, and was smouldering in half a dozen places; the table had disappeared entirely, and a yawning hole gaped where it had stood.

George de Kerhuel lay below the head of the couch, motionless, bleeding from a wound in the head. M. Chalrois was moaning, face downwards on the floor; but he lay quiet even as I looked at him—his back seemed torn to pieces. M. Dellieu lay quietly beside him; I saw blood running from his head and shoulders. Madame and Lotte! I can drop the sheet over them in the telling, but in my mind—never. The shell had burst right upon them, in their simple finery, put on to do us honour; and now—— Well, well! Let us pass them quickly. Their kindliness and goodness I never can forget, still less the horror of their ending; it was mercifully sharp. There was very little left of them, and I sobbed again, and sickened as I looked. The two maids by the door had fled screaming down the stairs. I learned afterwards that both were wounded. That any one of us escaped whole was a miracle.

"God!" gasped Myrtle, as all this broke on us through the curls of smoke. "We must get her out, Glyn."

"Yes," I said. "Help me." For all my back was sticky wet, and when I bent to take Marie gently under the arms, and Hugh took her feet, it felt as though that white-hot chisel was running up and down my flesh again.

"Stay," I said, laying her down again; "get blankets off my bed, Hugh." And I leaned dizzily against the couch, and watched the smouldering embers charring the floor in half a dozen places till he brought them.

It was no time for talk, and he asked no questions. We

swathed her in the blankets, and bore her carefully downstairs. The floor of the room shook under us as we crossed it.

"Where to?" asked Hugh as we reached the street door, round which an excited crowd had gathered.

"The other side of the river. But we must see to the others first."

The crowd raised a shout of surprise at sight of us, and willing hands were stretched out to relieve us of our burden.

"Tell them—get carriages—two carriages," I said, feeling as sick as a dog. "Will you—try for the others—upstairs?"

A couple of men sped away at once to look for carriages. In a dull way I heard Hugh explaining that there were more wounded upstairs, and that there was no danger, as a shell never struck twice in the same place; and I was too heavy-headed at the moment to recognise any lack of cogency in the argument. All I could think of was that Marie was still alive and, I thought, uninjured, and that my back had never felt so uncomfortable in all my life as it was feeling just then. Half a dozen men ran up after Hugh, and presently two of them appeared, with very white faces, bearing M. Dellieu, and behind them came another two, with still whiter faces, carrying George. They all started swearing and spitting as soon as they reached the ground, and I think it likely none of them will ever forget what they saw in that room.

A couple of fiacres came up to the outskirts of the crowd, and Hugh and I placed Marie in one; but when the other driver saw the bleeding men who were to go into his vehicle he was for refusing the job, at which the people threatened to smash him and all his belongings into pieces, and he growlingly turned his cushions upside down, and took his cargo aboard.

I got into the carriage beside Marie, and I remember asking Hugh to give money to the men who had helped us. He told me afterwards they would none of them take it. The smoke was beginning to roll slowly out of the broken front of the Lion d'Or as we drove away.

Marie opened her eyes as we started, and looked wildly about her.

"Oh, Charles!" she said with a sob. "The horror!"

"Thank God we are spared, dearest," I said, for the sight of her come to herself was the best tonic in the world.

"Who—who is left?" she said tearfully.

"George and M. Dellieu and Myrtle are in the cab in front; the rest, I fear, are dead."

She closed her eyes, and I could feel her sobbings through the blankets.

To my surprise we stopped almost immediately, and I saw we were at the Salpêtrière.

Myrtle came to the door.

"Further, Hugh," I said. "Across the river; this is not safe."

"All right, old man; we'll have you strapped up first, and get you a decent coat. You're all in rags," he said cheerfully. "Miss Marie, you are better. We'll all get a brace up inside here before we go on."

The wounded men were already being carried from the other cab, and I saw that it was the best place to have come to.

I got stiffly out, and Myrtle gave his arm to Marie, and we all went limply in. He bade our driver wait; the other one he paid and sent away. Marie they took away to Dr. Morin's room, and Myrtle was back in a moment to help me.

"Ma'm'selle has not a scratch," he said, in his usual cheery way, as he assisted me to his own bed; "it is providential. I expect you took her share. Now let's get off these dilapidated garments and see what's the matter. Phew! What a mess!" as my blood-soaked rags fell to the floor and disclosed the wound. "It's a tidy rip, but only flesh, and a nice, clean wound," he said, as he sponged and examined carefully, and proceeded to bandage me up. "That shirt and coat are done for; I'll steal you some more presently. What do you think about stopping here, Charlie?"

"I'd sooner get further away. How are George and M. Dellieu? What's wrong?"

"The captain got a piece out of the top of his head.

Painful, but no damage to brain. His left arm will have to go, I fear. From the elbow up it's stripped almost bare of flesh. The pastor's head is damaged too, and his shoulder got it pretty hot. If he'd been at the other side, he'd have been pulped, like the other little man. Shells, when they do their work properly, are devilish things; they ought not to be allowed in family circles. Now, about stopping here? I'm inclined to think the risks are about even. It will be difficult to find another place so late as this. You'll both be the better of a night's rest, and it's pure chance if another shell comes after us; if it does, I shall begin to think you're the Jonah of this ship."

"All right," I said, for I began to feel suddenly weak and tired. "Will you see to Marie? I can't."

"Ma'm'selle's all right, my boy. Old Morin's fallen in love with her. He's just seeing to the other two, and then he'll come in here; I said I'd see to you myself."

I must have fallen asleep then, for I remember nothing more till next morning, when I awoke stiff and full of pain, but apart from this feeling much myself again.

"All doing well!" was Hugh's cheery greeting, before I could ask any questions. "I've been having a talk with Captain George, and we've been trying to persuade Morin that he'll have to move the men; but he says he'll be damned if he does. The captain says we're well within a double range here, and Morin says he'll put up another half-dozen white flags; the town will be a mass of white flags soon. If you think it best to take Ma'm'selle right out of it, I'll take a run round when I've had some coffee, and see what I can find. There should be no lack of lodgings, since the population has sunk so. How's the back? Stiff, of course, and a bit creepy-crawly. Don't feel as if it were going to complicate at all, does it?"

"No, I don't think so; but I feel jangled. I'll not feel right till I'm sure Marie's safely out of fire."

"Right! I'll see to it. The captain's been giving me points. He and the pastor had better stop here for a few days; they'll get better attention right on the spot."

Marie came in presently on good old Morin's arm, which seemed proud of its burden and reluctant to let it go. He did his best to argue me into stopping where I was, but I was not to be convinced. We had escaped once, by God's good mercy, and heaven helps them that help themselves. It seemed to me that my duty lay in keeping her out of danger, rather than in tempting Providence by remaining within range of the Prussian batteries.

At noon Hugh returned with the news that he had found rooms in a house in the Rue de la Monnaie, almost facing on to the Pont Neuf, which Captain George believed to be well within the zone of safety; and in the afternoon he helped me into the ward where George and M. Dellieu were lying in adjacent beds.

I attempted to apologise for having got them into such condition; but they cut me short, and declined to recognise that it was my fault at all.

"I am going to take Marie away, George," I said. "The thought of her being exposed to such as happened yesterday is too much for me."

"Yes, take her, Charles," he said; "you saved her life, and she is yours. This place might be wrecked at any moment, in spite of their white flags. Shells are the devil's own playthings, and they're colour blind."

"I will take every care of her."

"I know it, my dear. I shall get out of this as soon as I can, and I'll come and stop with you. They took my arm off this morning; it was too far gone to save. Curse that shell."

M. Dellieu took his wounds patiently, and expressed the hope that he would still have the pleasure of completing that ceremony. And I limped away, promising to come back as soon as possible.

Then Myrtle helped me down to a cab, where Marie was already waiting, with Dr. Morin, bareheaded in spite of the thick frost fog, making his adieux through the open window.

CHAPTER XXX.

FRENCH LEAVE IN GERMAN QUARTERS.

It was an unusually large and handsome house to which our cab slowly made its way. It loomed through the fog like a great hotel, and I thought there must be some mistake.

"It's all right, old man," laughed Myrtle, when I expressed myself to that effect. "While I was at it, I thought I'd get the best possible. This is the town house of a big German banker; the old lady in charge is willing to make hay while the cannons roar, and we are the beneficiaries of her very laudable desire. For myself, I think she is quite right, and I'm glad old Cent-per-cent bolted."

Madame Two-sous, as Myrtle called her, wore a shawl, or perhaps several shawls, over her head because of the cold, and received us with infinitely greater courtesy than her master doubtless would have done under the circumstances. She greeted us with a mixture of bow and curtsey which was quite far removed from the manners of any concièrge I had ever met before, and expressed her extreme gratification at sight of us.

"Monsieur has seen the rooms," she said to Myrtle. "It is not necessary that I ascend unless Madame desires it."

Madame had no extreme longing that way, so we slowly crossed the courtyard alone, and entered the mansion by the front door.

Myrtle did the honours with extreme enjoyment. A broad-based tin candlestick awaited us on an ebony table in the hall. Hugh produced a parcel of candles from his pocket, solemnly swaddled the end of one of them in paper in order to steady it in the candlestick, offered Marie his arm, for it was all I could do to get myself along, and marshalled us upstairs with all the *empressement* of a host conferring the freedom of his ancestral halls on a couple of distinguished wayfarers. Up a wide, polished staircase, along a passage, through a picture gallery—"Ancestors!"

said Hugh, with a comprehensive wave of the candle; through a drawing-room full of sheeted ghosts of furniture—"Excuse the shrouds; they are typical of the times," from Hugh once more, and so into a smaller room which opened off it, and there he stopped and fixed two more candles in candlesticks on the mantelpiece, and applied a match to a bundle of suspicious-looking fuel on the hearth.

"Now, how's that?" he asked.

"It is magnificent," I said, "but is it——"

"Exactly, my dear boy, you've hit it. It is war."

"I was going to ask if we had any right to be here."

"Pray sit down, and make yourselves quite at home. Miss Marie, this is the most comfortable chair in the house; it is dedicated to your service henceforth and for ever. That is to say, until Mr. the Proprietor resumes possession. Charles, my friend, put aside that Doubting Thomas look, and be at your ease. We have absolutely as much right here as the old lady downstairs."

"That may not be saying much," I said, smiling at recollection of a story I had heard.

"As a matter of fact it is not. She is an interloper; so are we. But she's in sole possession of the fortress, or was until five minutes ago. Now we share it with her. What are you laughing at, you disintegrated invalid?"

"Is she not the concièrge?"

"She is—by her own appointment. The real concièrge and his wife were Germans. They disappeared about a week ago, probably hanged as spies, which quite possibly they were. This old lady saw a good post going a-begging, and she thought she would fit it. I quite agree with her."

"So do I. Do you know that same thing happened at no less a place than the Tuileries? When the Government went to look over it a couple of months ago they were received by the governor, who showed them round, and gave them lunch and wine in his own apartments, and they quite enjoyed their excursion. When they were leaving, one of them chanced to ask the affable gentleman who it was that had given him the appointment.. And his reply was, 'I myself gave myself the position, Messieurs, just as you gentle-

men have given yourselves yours.' And there was nothing left to say."

"There are several sides to a siege," said Myrtle. "I've had no experience of the outside, but the inside does not lack its humorous aspects. If I'd known that about the Tuileries I'd have gone there, but I think we can get along with this."

"How did you tumble across it?"

"You remember that boy Toussoux—the one with very red hair, and a ball through the lungs? The old lady downstairs is his mother. He heard me discussing plans with the captain, and he told me to come here."

"And you will stop here with us?" I asked.

"Goodness gracious, boy, yes! What on earth do you take me for? I'm chaperon, as well as doctor and head nurse. If those abominable Prussians had held that shell just a few minutes longer, you see, half my rôle would have been gone."

"Possibly the whole of it."

"That's so. But better chaperon and doctor than plugged full of Prussian shell. I am also prepared to act as chief cook and principal housemaid—in fact, there is absolutely no limit to the capacities in which I am ready to be made use of."

"That is what comes of being a friend in need, you see."

"Providence having thrown you two children on my hands, I expect to be called to strictest account if anything goes wrong with you."

It was simply daffing to round the obtrusive angles of the situation, and it served its purpose. Marie was very quiet, but perhaps that was not to be wondered at. She had fallen in with every suggestion that had been made, without a sign of objection; but yesterday's terrible experience must have dealt sorely with nerves already bruised and tender from the trying times through which they had so lately passed. She trusted in us with the confident trust of a child. That there really was nothing else to do in no way detracted from the winsomeness of it, and Myrtle, I could see, was almost as much touched by it as I was myself.

"What are we going to live on, Doctor?" I asked. "It's a fine cage you've brought us to, but we can't live on furniture and decorations."

"Ah-ha! That's a good sign. Appetite improving. I'm not sure we couldn't live on the furniture if we were put to it; but I'm head of the commissariat, my boy, and we'll share alike."

"Then we're all right; I know you won't starve."

"Starve? Not much. As soon as that fire burns down a bit, the soup goes on; it only needs warming up. And then I've got a toothsome ragoût in course of construction downstairs in the old lady's chamber. She is to have some, so I presume you'll say it's sure to be good. As for wine, there's a huge cellarful down below. We'll levy on it reasonably, and settle with Mein Herr later, if he has the ill grace to ask it. If our friends in Montmartre knew of it, I doubt if he'd find much when he returns. À la guerre, comme à la guerre. However, we're honest people, and we'll represent the whole matter to the banker, and if he's properly built he'll say, 'You did qvite rrright, mein chiltren. Maegk yourselves qvite ad home. Only too glad I vas not there to enderdain you.'"

"You must let me help with the housekeeping, Mr. Myrtle," said Marie, with a faint smile. It was the first word she had spoken, and it was sweet to hear.

"When you are strong enough, Ma'm'selle," he said; "but I'm in command at present, and I'm going to feed you two like fighting cocks, and all you've got to do is to lie still and do what you're told, and get strong and fat. The bedrooms are along the passage through that door. Lovely feather beds, and crimson silk dittos on top. Herr Cent-per-cent knew how to sleep warm, at all events. I'll light up the fires in the other rooms as soon as I've got this soup on, and then I'll run down and stir up the old lady and the ragoût." And he bustled about, set a black pot astride the core of the fire, and emptied the contents of a tin can into it. Then away with his tin candle to light the bedroom fires, and back in no time, rolling a round table from a corner of the room up to the hearth, flinging a cloth on it, switching out of the

sideboard plates and knives and forks and three good-sized pieces of bread, then some glasses, and finally a couple of bottles of wine from a basket in the corner.

"A very good Madeira," he said, as he dumped down the bottles, "and an excellent port. I've sampled both. Ma'm'selle will take a glass of each at each meal. The disintegrated invalid is also allowed a glass of each, unless he reports feverish symptoms. I, as head cook and chief butler, am entitled to all that's left, but being of a modest and temperate nature shall probably forego my rights. Now I'll go and take a peep at the ragoût, lest the old lady eat it all up. Don't you two let that soup boil over." And off he went.

"Hugh's enjoying himself," I said, as I crawled over and kissed her.

"It is very good of him," said Marie, and her eyes glistened softly in the firelight. "I cannot tell you, my dear, how good it is to feel oneself being taken care of again. The loneliness was dreadful, and the feeling that no one cared what became of one. How can I ever be grateful enough to you both?"

"It is we who are grateful, dearest; grateful beyond words."

"You saved my life again yesterday, Charles; it is my wound you are bearing."

"The thought of that is enough to cure it, my sweet."

"I wish I could bear some of the pain for you."

"I'm glad you can't. You have borne more than enough."

"Then every time it twinged I would say to myself, 'That is how my dear Charles loves me.'"

"I hope not."

"You know what I mean."

"Please God, my love shall never cause you a twinge, darling. We will hope we have seen the last of the painful times."

"Ah, it would no longer be pain, for it would only tell me of your love."

Then the soup boiled over, and we had both started to its rescue when Hugh came hurrying in.

"Ah-ha! Just as I expected," he said severely. "King Alfred and the cakes. You were discussing politics, I'll be bound. Most absorbing topic, but you can't do that and watch a pot at the same time. Now, then, Ma'm'selle est servie. Just smell that ragoût; the old lady's a genuine trump. The soup," he said, smacking his lips critically, and looking reprehensively at us both, "is a trifle overheated, but fortunately not smoked. The ragoût is beyond praise—I and the old lady saw to it. I've got"—and he sank his voice to a whisper, and glanced warily round the room—"three apples and a piece of cheese for dessert. There are two barrels of American apples in the cellar, but the cheese is a luxury, and is to be severely rationed. Mon dieu! as they say in France, I was forgetting the coffee." And he placed a curious double-bodied tin pot in the embers. "The old lady asserts that if I turn that upside down six times at intervals of two minutes the coffee will be made."

"Hugh Myrtle, you are magnificent," I said.

"My dear boy, don't tell me you are only just beginning to find that out. Why, I've known it for——"

"But I want to know where you get your firewood from?"

"Ah, well now, that's sheer impertinence, you know; still, impertinence implies convalescence—a very sick man is never impertinent. So, if you'll promise not to tell, I'll let you into the secret. It's a garret door we're burning at present; there are plenty more upstairs. We can settle for them along with the other things—if the absconding banker demands it."

Over our coffee, which had responded excellently to Myrtle's attentions, we were allowed to smoke by Ma'm'selle's special desire. And the restful time, with the prospect of plenty more to follow, was in itself a restorative, and went far towards bringing us all back to normal conditions.

The beds were all that Myrtle represented them. Marie took the room next to the small parlour, and Myrtle and I took the next two along the passage.

Morning found us all showing satisfactory improvement. Myrtle, as head housemaid, was up betimes, and lighted the

fire in the sitting-room, and prepared us coffee mixed with the new confection, condensed milk, of which he had procured a small supply from the hospital. He left us to prepare our second breakfast for ourselves, showed us where the tinned soup was, besought us not to let it boil over and get spoiled, and stated that Madame Two-sous would bring up a special stew at twelve o'clock.

Then he set off for the Salpêtrière, and his duties there and elsewhere, and we were left to our own devices and the self-sufficient enjoyment of one another's company.

The first thing to be done was obviously an inspection of our new domain, and this we accomplished slowly and with many a rest, for Marie was still not good for much exertion, and Myrtle had bound me up so tightly that I felt like a lamp-post.

It was a great house, and everywhere bore the impress of its owner's wealth and taste. The one floor on which we were living occupied us the whole day. The upper regions were left for future investigation. The house was a corner one, with frontage on two streets, and represented, roughly, two long parallelograms standing at right angles to one another. The inner space, forming the courtyard, was bounded by the blank wall of an adjoining house, and by a dividing wall which probably furnished a courtyard on the other side also. The rooms all looked into one or other of the streets, the windows of the corridor alone giving on to the courtyard. Thus the house was only one room and the corridor in width, but to make up for it it seemed unusually lofty. I counted five storeys above the one we occupied. The ground floor, I found later on, was used as a suite of offices for the banking business.

We discovered a well-furnished library, with books in many languages, and gratefully selected some to while away our hours of convalescence. To my very great surprise, I learned from the inscriptions in some of the books that the owner of the house was named von Marcius. I wondered much if this von Marcius was in any way related to my friends of Choisy. It would be strange indeed if I was indebted to them again for assistance in time of need. There

was also a well-appointed music-room, but we left it alone. Our spirits were not attuned to music at the moment. The sadness of our surroundings was upon us, and all we wanted was rest and quietness. The picture gallery was a helpful feast to us. There were sunny landscapes by Cuyp, and Constable, and De Wint, and they were soothing and restful, and lifted us for the time being out of the gloomy atmosphere of snow and fog and booming guns.

There were many portraits too, and we came at last on one family group of two boys and a girl, which solved at a glance my question as to a possible relationship between my friends of the outposts and the proprietor of the house we were in.

I told Marie all about them, and how they had assisted me into the city, and she was greatly interested.

"What a good-looking girl she is," she said, gazing steadfastly at the group, "and how very German. She looks ready to do and dare anything. Her eyes are as fearless as her brothers'. They are more like a man's eyes than a girl's. They are a different race from us; you would never find a French girl look like that, I think. But she is very beautiful."

"She is not half so beautiful as one French girl I know," and my arm slipped round the slim waist; "and, personally, I don't like girls with men's eyes. Girls should have girls' eyes, just like yours, my sweet."

We did not let the soup boil over this time, in spite of our other preoccupations. Madame's stew, whatever its composition, was excellent, and the day wore away all too quickly.

It has always been very strange to think of, that, while we were living thus, retired from the world, and as far removed as we well could be from all the strife and clamour of the war, the keenest eyes and the most powerful glasses in the German army were fixed night and day on the house we were in. But so it was, and we were all unconscious of it, and of the very strange place we had got into, and of the strange things that were to happen to us there.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THREE'S COMPANY, FOUR'S NONE.

I HAD not, so far, ventured to break to Marie the strange news concerning her father. It must inevitably be a great shock to her, and what her jangled nerves most needed was the opiate of absolute rest. All the same, it was a constraining burden to me to feel that I was carrying about with me, without her knowledge, a matter in which she was so vitally interested; and when, in the course of the afternoon, our talk drifted inevitably to Dinan and Kerhuel, it seemed to me that to withhold the news from her any longer was but to court unnecessarily painful reflection in the future.

So, "Marie," I said, "you have no reason to believe I am in a state of high fever or wandering in my mind, have you?"

"But no, Charles," she said, looking somewhat startled. "Why?"

"Because, dear, I have something so very strange to tell you that you will hardly credit it; but I may tell you that Hugh Myrtle is acquainted with the whole matter, and George now understands it."

"Oh, my dear," she said, gazing intently at me. "Whatever is it?"

"Your father, whom everybody supposed to be dead, has come home——"

"My—father?" she gasped. "But—mon dieu——"

I hastened to tell her the whole matter as briefly and tenderly as possible; and she sat looking at me, with her slim, white hands twisted in her lap, and a look of the most puzzled and pained amazement in her face. Her lips moved once or twice in an inaudible, "Mon dieu, mon dieu!" but she said no word till I had completed the story; and then, with no doubt of its truth or of my sanity, either of which I could readily have forgiven, she dropped her face into her

hands, sobbing, "Oh, the poor, poor father! What he must have suffered! And I do not know him, nor he me!"

"You will know and love one another soon, dearest; and you will comfort him for his long isolation."

"How very strange to think that you know my own father, Charles, before I know him myself."

"Yes, that is very strange; but not much stranger than that I should know your father's daughter even before he knows her. We will try to make up to him for all the years he has lost. It is terrible to think of; but, after all, it might have been still more trying to you all if he had been with you, dearest, for he has not been himself, you know."

"And you have no clue to the meaning of it all?"

"None, as yet. M. le Curé holds the key, unless I am very much mistaken; and, since Raoul and his father are dead, it is probably the sole remaining key."

"Ah!" she said, with a greater intensity of bitterness than I could have imagined in her, which yet gave me new delight in her, "M. le Curé!" And thereafter I saw that her thoughts were much exercised on the matter.

There was much turmoil in the streets that evening, bands of men and women, from the outer faubourgs we judged by their looks, marching to and fro in the sleety drizzle, and shouting themselves hoarse. Myrtle was so late coming in that we began to fear something had happened to him. When he did come at last he told us he had twice been stopped by the mob, and made to prove that he was not a spy. The second time another man had been arrested alongside him, and him they had hanged on a lamp-post.

"It's getting dangerous to walk about the streets," he said. Then, as his eye fell on the steaming soup, and he sniffed it gratefully from afar, he looked at us and asked, "Have you two had anything to eat since I left, or have you been so busy otherwise that you forgot all about it? You can't absolutely live on hm-hm, you know."

We reassured him on this point, and he fell to on the soup, and another stew which Madame Two-sous brought up, with an appetite bred of cold weather and much hard work.

"I have been telling Marie about her father, Hugh. You saw him later than I did; will you reassure her as to the prospects of his recovery?"

He looked at her with a professional eye, to see what effect the strange news had had on her, and then shook his head.

"I am not sure that Charles was right in telling you so soon, Ma'm'selle," he said; "but, under the circumstances, I suppose we must forgive him. I left your father improving in every way. His brain was quite clear; his strength was increasing every day, and his greatest desire was to see his children, whom he only remembered as little tots of two or three years old."

"Thank you," she said quietly. "It is all so strange that I think I scarcely realise it properly yet."

"How are George and M. Dellieu?" I asked.

"Both getting on all right. I propose bringing them here in a day or two. There's a good deal of pyæmia about the hospital, and it's almost impossible to ventilate properly there without freezing them to death. Besides, there is always the risk of shells, though so far they have escaped."

"And the rest of the boys?"

"On the whole, doing well; we are isolating the pyæmia cases. Many inquiries for you; I will give you the details later. I never like to talk shop over meals."

"One other thing—— Madame and Lotte? They were very kind to me. I would like to have——"

"It was impossible, my boy. I was round there yesterday. There are only bare walls remaining; it was beginning to burn when we left. Another shell came right into the house soon after we had gone. The people scattered, and the house was burnt out."

We passed another quiet evening, very grateful for the warmth and cosiness of our lodging, while outside the snow fell in slow, thin flakes, and the dull booming of the big guns never ceased.

Myrtle seemed to me preoccupied, and less spontaneous in his gaiety than usual. It was only when Marie bade us

an early good-night and went off to her room that I asked him if anything was wrong.

"Nothing wrong," he replied; "but I'm puzzled."

"What's the matter?"

"I'm not sure. As I came in to-night, after I had passed the old lady in her den, I could have sworn I saw someone in the courtyard just before I reached the door."

"Why, what did you see?"

"Well, it was very dark, and what with the fog and the snow it was not easy to see at all; but I got the very distinct impression of someone being there. I thought it must be you, and called out to you. Then, when I got no answer, I went back to the old lady, and asked her if anyone had entered, but she asserted positively that no one had."

"That's odd."

"Yes; it's deucedly unpleasant to think of there being someone about that we know nothing of."

"Perhaps you were mistaken."

"It is possible, but I've never been accused of imagination, and the impression I got was a very distinct one. Did you get all over the place to-day?"

"No, only this floor; we'll do the rest by degrees. What's upstairs?"

"Bedrooms above this, and above them garrets, mostly empty, but with good burnable doors. Some few locked—lumber rooms, probably; we'll overhaul them one of these days. It is quite possible for someone to have got in here before the old lady installed herself."

"That's certainly not pleasant to think of."

"Well, we can't do anything in the dark, and I'm about tired out. You lock your door at night?"

"Yes. I wonder if Marie does?"

"It would only upset her to say anything about it. To-morrow we'll have a look round. Firewood's running low in any case, and we can make good use of another door or two."

The bare possibility of anyone else having the run of the house, and of Marie possibly not locking her bedroom door, kept every faculty within me on the alert, and banished all

idea of sleeping. I piled more wood on my fire, and set the door wide, and determined to keep watch all night.

It was an old house, and had probably passed through strange times; and all night long, in its own peculiar way, it talked of them, and groaned over them, and took me tiptoe to the door a dozen times in the certainty that I heard footsteps in the passage. But I was always too late, and the passage was always empty; and, after standing straining my ears till they were like to burst, I would retire to my chair to listen for the next uncanny creak.

But, standing so in the passage one time, I fancied I heard a slight noise in the sitting-room, and sped softly that way to make sure; and, instantly almost, Hugh Myrtle was behind me, and we went into the room together.

It was empty, and lighted only by the smouldering glow from the hearth.

"Did you hear anything?" asked Hugh quickly.

"I fancied so, but it may have been only fancy."

He turned quickly to the door of the big drawing-room and opened it, and we went in and looked about; but only the sheeted furniture glimmered back at us, and there was not a sound of any kind.

"I will get a candle," said Hugh, and went back into the sitting-room for one. It took him a minute to light a spill of wood at the embers, and in that minute it seemed to me once more that I heard a faint sound; and as the glimmer of his approaching candle filtered through the doorway I fancied I saw a shadow flit across the deeper darkness at the further end of the big room.

"Hugh!" I cried, hastening forward as quickly as I was able.

"Hello! See anything?"

"I thought so. At the far end of the room." And he came hurrying after me, with his hand hollowed round the light. We searched the room through, and the passages beyond, but found nothing.

We said nothing to Marie in the morning. Before Hugh went off to the hospital, he and I climbed to the upper storey

on a voyage of discovery; but we found nothing of interest beyond the fact that there was much timber of one kind or another, which would all be exceedingly useful to us.

A spiral iron staircase corkscrewed up to a trap in the roof at the extreme end of the corridor, and when we went down the other corridor, which stood at right angles to the one we were in, we found a similar trap there. Both were bolted inside, and had no appearance of recent use; they were probably intended to give access to neighbouring roofs in case of fire.

There were four locked rooms, and we burst open the door of one of them to sample it. It contained only lumber, however, discarded furniture, and much dust, and we left the others alone, and, collecting a supply of fuel, went downstairs to light the fire and make the coffee. And when Hugh had partaken of it he sped off to his duties, bidding me keep my eyes open, and not let the soup boil over.

That day passed in peace and quietness, and without any disturbance, and it seemed to me that Marie grew fairer and stronger every hour. She was very thoughtful over the astonishing news I had given her the day before, but as sweetly responsive to the cravings of my hungry soul as I could have desired. My heart was full to overflowing with gratitude for her safe-coming through trials so great, both of mind and body.

Myrtle was late again getting home, and seemed much worried. I imagined some of it was due to the harassments of the previous night, for I knew he had slept no more than I had myself; but he told me that it was the state of matters at the hospital that was troubling him. Pyæmia was gaining on them terribly, in spite of all their efforts, and they were at their wits' end how to save the men.

George and M. Dellieu were in his room, and completely isolated, and he would bring them to our house at the first possible moment; but, meanwhile, the others were having a bad time. Man after man would be going on well, then suddenly the symptoms of blood-poisoning would declare themselves, and the case was doomed.

"You've seen nothing more of the family ghost, I suppose?" he asked, when Marie had retired.

"Not a scrap. I'm inclined to think it was nerves, and the creaky old house."

"I'm not so sure," he said, with a shake of the head; "but I must get some sleep to-night. It's no good both of us watching at the same time; suppose we take it in turns. And if you'll take first watch, say till midnight, and then rouse me out, I'll turn in now. I can hardly keep my eyes open."

I took first watch, and let it run on till three o'clock, as I knew he needed the rest, and I could sleep during the day.

Once I thought I heard a slight sound, and I crept down the corridor, past Marie's room, to the sitting-room. As I drew near I saw a faint flicker of light under the door. As I opened the door it seemed to me that the other door closed. I ran quickly to it, and looked into the big, ghostly room beyond; but there was neither sound nor sign of anything. In the sitting-room there was a faint smell of sulphur. The fire was only white ashes, and gave out no light whatever. This was very puzzling. I could have sworn I saw a light under the door, and that light certainly did not come from the fire. However, there was nothing there, and the room seemed exactly as we had left it.

I woke Myrtle at three o'clock, and told him of my little disturbance. He scolded me for my unpunctuality, and I fell asleep the moment I lay down.

His hand on my shoulder wakened me in the morning, and I found that he had had his coffee, and was ready to go out.

"Nothing happened," I said, "or you would have called me."

"Something happened, but as I didn't see it I didn't disturb you. Sure you didn't fall asleep during your watch?"

"Quite sure. Why?"

"Someone came during the night, and levied on our

bread, and I think on the tinned soup, though I can't be quite sure of that."

"How do you know?"

"I left three chunks of bread in that chiffonier for breakfast, and I cut them to an exact measure. Each piece is curtailed this morning. I imagined it was so yesterday, but I had not measured them, so could not be certain."

"That's odd. It couldn't have shrunk of its own accord, I suppose?"

"Not to the extent of one inch in six. That ghost is very smart, and is beginning to feel hungry, my boy. Just keep your eyes open, and we'll try a hunt through those locked garrets if I can get home in daylight. Don't try it alone; you're not in fighting trim yet. I'll get back if I can." And he went off for his day's battle with a deadlier enemy than the one at the gates.

But the afternoon faded into night, and he did not come; and, at last, having made the soup without any accidents, we started dinner without him.

"Listen, Charles!" said Marie, laying her hand on my arm. And, listening intently, as she was doing, I heard a hollow booming down below.

"What on earth is that?" I said, and started up to find out.

Going out into the corridor, and opening one of the windows looking into the courtyard, there was no doubt what it was. Someone was hammering furiously on the big outer door which gave onto the street.

"Myrtle for a dollar," I said to Marie, who had followed me. "What's happened to the old lady, I wonder? She's either fallen asleep or eaten all our second dish, and it's been too much for her. I'll go down and let him in. You go back into the room, dear, and keep warm."

I threw on my cloak and cap, and took a candle, and went down the passage and the wide staircase. The door between the big drawing-room and our parlour I had locked before dark. I had a moment's doubt about leaving Marie alone, but she knew nothing of the family ghost, as Myrtle called

it, and I did not wish to disturb her unnecessarily. I hastened down the stairs and across the courtyard, where the snow lay a couple of inches deep, and so to the outer door. I looked into Madame Two-sous' room in the tunnel-way, but it was empty. All the time, at intervals, the hammering continued.

I drew back the spring bolt of the small door which formed part of the large one, and Myrtle stepped inside.

"Hello, Charles! What's happened? Where's the old lady? I began to think I'd have to sleep on the pavement."

"I don't know what's taken her," I said, as we went into her little room; "it's a fortunate thing we heard you."

"I'm mighty glad you did," he said; "it's a good deal warmer upstairs than down, and I'm as hungry as three. Did she cook us any dinner before she vanished?"

"Nothing's come up," I said, and looked round to see if it was anywhere visible.

But the fire was only a glowing heap of ashes, and there was no sign of cooking about. We poked round, however, till we found the meat which was evidently to have formed our meal; dark-coloured meat, which did not look nearly so tempting in its raw state as it might do when made into ragout or stew.

"Now, I wonder what's taken Madame?" said Myrtle. "We can't leave the door on the spring," and he proceeded to bolt it. "If she comes, she must knock as I did; and, meanwhile, we'll take the meat upstairs, and a pan, and see what we can make of it ourselves."

Common sense told us to take such flavourings as we could lay our hands on, and with these and the pan we set out for the upper regions.

Before we reached the steps leading up out of the courtyard into the house itself, Myrtle gripped my arm suddenly, and brought me to a stand.

"You came straight across?" he asked.

"Yes, as fast as I could, to see what all the noise was about."

"And you did not go back at all?"

"No."

"Look there," he said, pointing downwards. "What the devil does it all mean?"

There were the marks of another pair of feet beside my own, and in places mixed with them—a double track leading to and from the tunnel-way.

"It looks as if the old lady had gone upstairs," I said.

"The old lady? Not a bit of it, my boy. The old lady's feet are three times the size; that's the ghost, as sure as you're alive. It rather looks as if it had come out of the house, frightened the old lady into the street, and then gone back again. What the deuce does it all mean?"

We followed the footsteps into the house, and there, of course, lost them, and went thoughtfully upstairs.

We reported the defection of Madame Two-sous, and Marie immediately took the cooking in hand.

"What is it?" she asked, looking a little suspiciously at the dark, stringy meat.

"Well," said Myrtle, "I've an idea it's siege beef, or something of that kind."

"Horse?" asked Marie.

"Well, if you corner me like that, horse, or mule, or something equally toothsome."

"We must stew it," she said. "You didn't think to bring—— Ah, merci; now we can manage all right. With those, and a little of the soup, it will do very well; but you will have to wait some time for it."

"We'll make a start with the soup, and dally over it till the principal dish is ready." And our new cook proceeded to her duties.

"Do you know I saw no less than four fires as I came along," said Myrtle; "the shells are getting in their work. And we've had in three or four splinter casualties to-day."

"No shells come your way yet?" I asked.

"No, they seem to be respecting the flag; as was to be expected, unless by accident."

"Things any better with you?"

"Not a bit. There were five gone this morning, and

there'll be more to-morrow, and we can't stop it. It's hor rible. I wish to God the men at the helm would come to their senses, if they have any, and throw up the sponge. They haven't the ghost of a chance of winning even a point in the game, and what good they're hoping to do by holding out is beyond any man's understanding."

The stew, when at last our arbitrary chef pronounced it ready, was excellent, and we filled her sweet face with blushes by our praises of it. Before we had quite finished our meal, the streets were filled with the heavy roll of the gun wheels, and the tramp of many marching men.

"What's up now?" said Myrtle, going to the window.

"Another sortie, I expect."

"H'm, a lot more killed and wounded, and never a step forrarder. It's pitiful work. See, there, up in the sky, the coppery glow! That's a fire, and there's another over yonder."

"Poor Paris! Poor France!" said Marie with a sigh, as she leaned her white forehead against the pane. "It is very terrible. Pity and mercy are dead, and there is nothing left but cold, and misery, and desolation." And as she turned away into the room her eyes were full of tears. She waved us a silent good-night, and went away to her room, and, I have little doubt, to her knees, to pray for her country as a mother prays for her erring child, whom the world, indeed, may condemn, but who is none the less her child.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE GHOST ON THE ROOF.

"We must watch again to-night, Charles," said Myrtle, "and we must watch closer than ever. I'm going to lay traps." And he drew out a ball of stout string, and, taking a candle, proceeded to wind it round the legs of chairs and tables and sofas in the big drawing-room, in so intricate a network that a cat would have found some difficulty in making its way through without falling foul of it. He did the same in the passage, running his line from door handles to handles of windows or any other projection he could find.

"Now, if anyone goes down that passage in the dark, we shall at all events hear from him," he said. "Will you take first watch again? And I suggest your occupying this room. If you don't waken me at midnight, I'll doctor you to-morrow."

I smoked till midnight, and never heard a sound except the dull reports of the distant guns. Then I woke him and turned in.

I was awakened as on the previous night by his hand on my shoulder; but this time it was still dark, and I found him by my bedside with a lighted candle in his hand.

"Come here, quietly," he said, and waited while I slipped on my coat and trousers; and then, leaving the light in my room, led the way up the corridor, ducking under his strings as we came cautiously against them.

At the angle window looking into the courtyard he stopped, and said in a whisper, "Look up there, straight across."

And, looking up and across at the roof of the next house, I saw what I took at first to be the hazy moon; and then I saw it slowly descend till it went out of sight, and then ascend again, and then again descend.

"What on earth is it?" I asked.

"It's a light," he whispered; "a lantern. It's signal-

ling, and I'm ready to bet you any money it's giving information about the sortie that's just about to come off. That's the ghost, as sure as a gun."

"Can't we stop it?"

"I'm not sure that we can, and I'm not quite clear in my own mind that we have a right to try. We're trespassers here, you see, and we're non-combatants, and anyhow it's not our roof. It is for those chiefly concerned to stop it, if they can."

"If those chiefly concerned tumble to it, and find out that this house has any connection with it, everybody in this house will get pretty short shrift."

"That's so, my boy. Come on upstairs, and we'll see what we can do. Self-preservation is a law of nature, after all." And we went quietly back along the corridor, got caps and cloaks, and climbed the stairs leading to the attics.

We found our way to the spiral steps leading up to the roof. Myrtle ran up them, and began to wrestle with the rusty iron bolt. While he worked I glanced out of the window to see if the light was still there. As I looked it was glowing at its highest altitude, and the next moment it was shattered, as though by a violent blow, and disappeared.

"Light's gone, Hugh," I said. "Been shot at, I think." And at the same moment the bolt creaked back, and he pushed the trap open with his head. A small shower of snow fell down, and the keen air rushed in. Myrtle climbed lightly on to the roof, and I followed him.

The snow lay thinly on the roof, which was almost flat. Through the dwarf pillars of a stone balustrade which ran round it I counted no less than a dozen fires on the south side of the river. The sky on that side glowed dully, and throbbed and pulsed like molten copper. Further afield I caught the boom of the big guns. The distant hills sparkled with vicious spits of flame, and now and again an ill-timed shell burst in mid-air, with a thin crackle, like a rocket.

But there was not much time for looking about. Myrtle was off, through the ghostly glimmer of the snow, round the angle of the roof, and I followed him. A small iron ladder

led up and down across the party wall that divided our house from the next one. We groped up and over, and then along by the stone balcony till we turned the next angle at the extreme end of which we had seen the light. But now all was dark and silent as the grave. Then, from the street below, there rose a sudden tumult, angry voices, and furious battering on a door.

"They'll be up here in no time," said Myrtle.

He bent hastily and struck a match, and held it down to the snow in the hollow of his hand, and looked carefully round.

"I thought so," he said. And I saw a track of footsteps which led to and from the place where we stood towards the further angle of the roof.

"You get back, Charles, and step light. I'll see to this." And he took off his cloak, and went cautiously forward, and I heard him swishing the snow violently about to obliterate the trail leading to our roof. He worked backwards towards me. The hammering on the door below continued, and then suddenly ceased. Hugh reached the iron ladder, working his big horseman's cloak like a flail. He came down our side, and scooped together some snow, and bent over and dropped it lightly on the rungs on both sides. He continued his operations to the other trap, which we had not used. It was bare of snow. He collected some, and dusted it lightly. He did the same with our own trap, and drew it carefully down over him, and shot the bolt home. Then, without a word, he led the way rapidly round the angle of the corridor till we stood by the spiral stair under the other trap door. He felt along the treads in the dark, and after a moment's search placed in my hand a little pad of snow, such as gathers on a man's boot.

"He came in this way," he whispered, and proceeded to dust the stairs vigorously with his cloak.

"We can't do any more," he said. "You wait here. I'll slip down and see if all's right below." And he disappeared along the corridor, while I strained my ears both up and down, and looked out of the window.

Presently I saw lights twinkling on the roof of the next house. They flitted to and fro, and at last came our way Men's feet moved about above my head, and then, with exceeding thankfulness, I heard a harsh voice, through the muffling of the trap door, say:

"No; no one has passed this way. Allons! It is that other house. Search it from top to bottom," and the feet moved away. Hugh's precautions had been well taken, and had doubtless saved our lives.

"All's right below," he whispered. "Anything going on up here?"

I told him what had passed.

"We'd better get down and get to bed," he said, "in case they take it into their heads to pay us a visit."

But our adventures for the night were over, and we were not further disturbed.

Myrtle was up at dawn to go out with the ambulances. The official call had probably been left at the hospital after he left the previous night. Marie was out of her room and preparing coffee as soon as she heard us on the move; and when we had had it I went down to bolt the door after him. But as soon as we opened it he stepped into the arms of a picket, that stood waiting there to see who came out.

The officer in charge questioned us at once as to who we were, and what we were doing there.

We informed him that we were a branch of the Salpétrière Ambulance, that I was off duty from a wound, and that Myrtle was then on his way to take out the vans to the front.

"Anyone else in the house?" he asked brusquely, as he handed us back our papers after perusal.

"Yes; Mademoiselle de Kerhuel, sister of Captain de Kerhuel, of the Breton Mobiles."

"I know Captain de Kerhuel. Where is he of late?"

"In the Salpétrière, wounded by the same shell that wounded me. He is to be brought here as soon as he can be moved. His left arm was taken off the other day."

"I will see Mdlle. de Kerhuel for a moment. You"—

to his men—"wait here. You, Monsieur"—to Hugh—"pass on to your duties. You will be wanted." And to me, "Now, Monsieur." And we bolted the door, and went across the courtyard and upstairs.

Marie was much surprised at our visitor, but received him with charming naïveté, and answered his questions—the drift of which I understood perfectly, though she did not—in a way that disarmed all suspicion on his part.

He accepted a cup of coffee, and complimented her upon it; hoped her brother would soon be all right again, as good officers were none too plentiful, and so rattled away downstairs, and left us in peace.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HRATS AND HREVOLVERS IN THE CELLAR.

My wound was healing well, in spite of these anxieties. There was no fever, I was feeding up well, and if I lost rest at night I was always able to make up for it during the day, wherein I was better off than Myrtle.

That day, while Marie was busy preparing second breakfast, I climbed the stairs again, and, in spite of Myrtle's instructions, succeeded, with some difficulty, because of my bandages and the necessity for no undue exertion, in breaking open the doors of the closed attics.

Two of them were lumber rooms, like the one we had already entered; the other showed unmistakable signs of recent occupation.

There were ashes on the hearth, a comfortable camp bed in one corner, plates and cups and cooking utensils, several tins of condensed milk—one half used—several unopened bottles of wine, and a number of empty ones, and—of all things in the world to find in such a place and at such a time—on the bed lay a copy of "The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club." Our ghost was evidently of a humorous turn of mind, and capable of reading English.

I listened all day for the heavy firing of the forts, which always preceded a sortie, but it was not till evening that it began, and I was not surprised when Myrtle never made his appearance at all that night. I listened constantly, in case he should be hammering at the gate. But he did not come, and the day passed with us as quietly and happily as the days usually did. It was only by night that our ghost walked.

It was close on midnight when at last I heard the summons on the outer door, and went down to answer it.

"I'm glad to see you back, old man," I said; "I was beginning to fear you had got hit."

"Not a bit of it," he said; "but I'm about as done up as if I had."

"Heaps of casualties?" I asked, as we climbed the stairs.

"Heaps and heaps. I've had most of them taken to the Champs Elysées to the Americans. Their tents are capital; not a single pyæmia case there. They get lots of air, without being frozen. Might as well shoot them on the spot as put them into our wards."

We had saved him his dinner, and he ate heartily and drank every drop of wine we had, while he told us of the things he had seen outside at Le Bourget.

He was dead tired, and I insisted on his taking a full night's rest. He attempted to discuss the matter, but fell asleep in the middle of his first argument, and it was with difficulty that I got him awake enough to roll to his own room and fall on the bed there.

I returned to the sitting-room, kissed Marie good-night, and sent her off to bed. Then I got Myrtle's string, and wove his intricate cat's cradle between the legs of the furniture in the drawing-room, and, leaving the door ajar so that I might hear the slightest sound, I drew Marie's chair up against the wall on the further side of the fireplace, and sat down to keep my watch.

A very comfortable chair, and very pleasant thoughts of one who has just been sitting in it, especially if she be the sweetest girl in all the world and the possessor of one's whole heart—these things are not the best accompaniments of a close and careful watch. The pieces of wood on the hearth burned through and fell apart, the white ashes smouldered and crinkled, and I sat thinking of it all—Marie and her mother and mine, and our dear Jean who was gone, and George who was so strangely changed, and the father, and M. le Curé—and I suppose I fell asleep.

I woke with a start, not quite sure whether I had heard a sound or dreamed one.

It came again, from the other side of the table, where the chiffonier stood in which we kept our supplies.

The room was quite dark. The wood ashes had life in them at the core, but gave out no light.

I waited motionless, straining every nerve to make out

what it was. Again a tiny click, as of a knife against a plate, and I started up with, "Hello, there!" At which there came a surprised jump from behind the table, and a quick rush to the drawing-room door, which was the nearest. Then, from the cat's cradle, there came a heavy fall, succeeded by wild turmoil and further falls, as piece after piece of furniture was jerked out of position by the frantic struggles of the one in the toils.

I hastily lighted a candle and followed, just in time to get a glimpse of what looked like a burly figure disappearing through the door at the far end of the room. I made my way to it as quickly as possible, but by the time I got there the intruder had vanished. The house beyond seemed as silent as the grave. I went down the stairs, but the door leading to the courtyard was fastened on the inside, just as I had left it after admitting Myrtle. I could make nothing of it, and returned to the sitting-room.

As soon as I heard Myrtle moving in his room in the morning, I went in and told him of my experiences.

"The ghost is materialising by degrees," he said; "we shall take him in the flesh before long. Did I drink up all the wine last night, Charles?"

"You did, my boy, but there wasn't much there."

"I'd an idea I did; I'm going down to the cellar to get some more. I wonder if there's any chance of meeting Mr. Ghost there. If I don't turn up shortly, you'd better come and search for my remains." And he picked up the wicker basket divided into compartments, in which we kept our wine, and went gaily off on his errand.

Marie came out of her room, gravely sweet, as was usual with her now—so very different from the merry madcap who tripped barefoot across the old weir at Kerhuel, yet not one whit the less charming. She had gone through much since those happy days; but it all made for breadth, and height, and depth, and the perfecting of her sweetness.

She greeted me with a kiss, and set to work making the coffee, which she always made excellently well.

The coffee made, we sat waiting for Hugh.

"He went to the cellar to get him some wine," I explained. "His conscience pricked him at having drunk us dry last night."

"Is he all right again?" she asked. "He seemed fagged to death."

"Oh, he's all right. A good night's rest always pulls a fellow round, if there's nothing else the matter with him."

But still we waited, and still he did not come.

I'll go and help him with the bottles," I said, and went off in the direction of the cellar, which was at the other end of the house.

The door at the bottom of a flight of stone steps was ajar, and as I pushed it open a voice—not Myrtle's voice—cried in French, "Help me! I have shot him."

I had stupidly come without a candle, but I had matches, villainous sulphur things, which burned pale smells before they gave any light. I struck one, and as it glimmered into life I got a glimpse of the astounding sight of Hugh Myrtle stretched full length on the floor, with his head on the knees of a boy in a blouse, who was bending over him.

"Hello!" I cried. "What's the matter here?" And the match went out.

"Oh, help me!" said the boy in English. "I have shot him. I fear he is dead, but I did not mean to kill him."

"Help me to carry him upstairs, and we will see what's wrong with him." And I set another match fuming.

"Ah, I cannot help. I cannot walk."

I bent over Myrtle, and ran my hand inside his vest.

"Will you wait here with him till I get a light?" I said.

"I will wait. Is he badly hurt?"

"I cannot examine him here; but his heart is fairly good."

I went back at once, and decided that I must ask Marie to help me, as I could not possibly get him up two flights of stairs all alone.

"He's had an accident, Marie," I said, as I got the candle, "and is lying in the cellar unconscious Will you

give me a hand with him, dear? I cannot manage him alone."

"But surely," she said, and hastened to follow me.

"What was it, then?" she asked, as we hurried along the passage. "Did he fall?"

"I can't say what's wrong till I've examined him; there's a boy down there with him."

"A boy! Why, where did he come from?"

"That I don't know, either; but he says he can't walk, and so he couldn't help me with Hugh." And we went down the stone steps into the cellar.

And surely we made a strange enough group there. The candle flickered dimly on the vaulted roof, and winked back at us from the wide, round eyes of the bottles in the serried bins, and cast grotesquely dancing shadows when we moved. Hugh still lay there motionless, with his head on the boy's knees. Marie bent over them with her white face full of pity and concern, and the boy in the blue blouse looked up at her with wide, anxious eyes.

"He is not dead," he said, "I can feel his heart beating." And Marie drew back, and gazed steadily at him.

"Now, Marie dear, if you will lift his feet," I said, "I will try his shoulders." And we lifted him with difficulty, for a man's body is no light weight, and carried him slowly to the stairs, and rested him there for a moment.

"You must come too," I said to the boy.

"I cannot put my foot to the ground," he said.

"If you will wait, I will come and help you. What's the matter with it?"

"It is hurt."

"Well, wait, and I'll see to it. I am a doctor." And we bent again to our burden.

It was a heavy pull up the stairs, and I felt my half-healed wound break open before we got to the top; but there was nothing else for it, and we managed it. And, at last, with infinite difficulty, we got him to his room, and dragged the mattress off the bed and laid him on it, for lift him on to the bed we could not. I begged Marie to return

to the boy. I had a quite unnecessary fear lest he should escape.

"It is not a boy, Charles," she said; "it is a girl in boy's clothes."

"Are you quite sure, Marie?" I asked in great surprise.

"Quite sure. Could you not tell by her voice?"

"I did not notice it specially; I was thinking only of Hugh. If you will go to him—her, I mean—dear, I will just see what is wrong here, and come to you in a moment." And she sped back to the cellar.

The bullet had entered at the base of Hugh's neck. He had probably ducked at sight of the revolver close against his face, for the skin was blackened with the discharge.

I bound up the wound, which, though small, was bleeding freely. The bullet had to wait, as I had no tools to extract it with. I got him some cognac from the bottle we used with our after-dinner coffee, and he opened his eyes as it trickled down his throat.

"What's happened?" he asked quietly

"You got shot in the cellar. I've tied you up, and we'll get the bullet out later."

"Where is it?"

"Down among your shoulder-blades, I should say. Just lie quiet for a bit, old chap, and remember I'm doctor now."

"Did you catch the fellow?"

"Yes, I'm going down for him now. Marie says he's a girl."

"A what?" he said, trying to sit up.

"A girl, my boy; a kind of female boy, don't you know."

"I've heard of them," he said, "but I never came across one of this kind before. Go and bring her up, and let's have a look at her."

Marie and the new-comer were coming slowly along the passage as I came out of his room, and the young person in the blouse and trousers was hopping along, with twisted face and one foot drooping behind, and her arm through Marie's. I went to help, and we got her into the easy chair in the sitting-room.

"Now let me see to that foot. What is wrong with it?" I said, looking into her face in a clear light for the first time, and in an instant I knew who she was.

The large blue eyes looked up into mine without any sign of fear in them, though they were troubled and anxious enough.

"It is sp-hrained," she said in English, with scarce a trace of accent, but with a guttural catch on the r.

She drew off her stocking without a moment's hesitation, but with not a little difficulty, and showed a well-shaped foot, swollen to twice its proper size, and almost black with the irritation.

"Will you get me hot water, Marie dear, as hot as you can, and as quick as you can? We must see to this at once. It is painful, Fraulein, I am sure."

She glanced up quickly at me, and said, "Yes, it hurts. How do you know me?"

"I met your brothers outside. They were very kind to me. I shall be glad to pay back some of my debt."

"Heinrich and Leo? Oh, I am glad," she cried, with a blaze in the big blue eyes. "How are they? I have had no news for—oh, months and months."

"Leo was all right. Heinrich lost an arm at Choisy, and would be invalided home."

"Which arm?" she asked quickly.

"The right, from the shoulder."

"That is bad. He is out of it, then."

"He's safe at all events."

"How is your fhriend? Is it a bad wound?"

"The bullet went in at the neck, and is somewhere in his back. I will get it out as soon as I can get my tools from the hospital. Why did you shoot him?"

"Oh, I did not hreally mean to," she said penitently. "You two have hunted me almost to death, and last night you bhroke my ankle with your detestable st-hrings among the chairs." And Marie's eyes grew wider as she listened.

"I am sorry," I said.

"Then he came down and caught me in the wine-cellar.

Oh, it was torture to get there"—and her face twisted again at the recollection—"and it was very dismal, and all night long the hrats had been coming about, and I had to hrattle things to keep them away. Your fhriend came whistling down the stair—it was the Faust chorus he was whistling. I was t-hrying to c-hreep out of sight, when he opened the door and heard me. He called out, "Who goes there?" and then he came st-hraight at me. I had pulled out the hrevolver when I heard him coming. I chried, "Keep back!" And then, when he jumped at me, my sick foot went down on something that wriggled—a hrat, I think—and I sc-hreamed, and the hrevolver went off, and he fell, and I thought I had killed him, and I had never killed anyone before."

All this with much animation, and evident relief in the telling.

"You will tell him I did not mean to hurt him, will you not?"

"Yes, I'll tell him. He is very anxious to see what kind of a young lady it was that shot him."

"He is alive again, then?"

"Oh, yes, he's alive again, and will be, I hope, for a very long time; he's too good a man to lose. How is that, now?" as Marie rested from her fomentation for a moment.

"That makes it more comfortable," she said, "and being upstairs again, and among—fhriends? May I say it?"

"Certainly," I said.

"This was my morning-room," she said; and then, suddenly, "I would so like something to eat. Have you got anything?"

"We've got plenty of soup, but not much meat."

"Soup! Oh, do please give me some soup; I am famished."

Marie already had some on the fire in the saucepan, and she placed a savoury plateful before the hungry girl at once.

"Thousand thanks!" said she, and began taking it up with a speed which showed her appetite. "May I have a little piece of bhread, please?"

"Somebody has been stealing—no, helping themselves to—our bread," I said, laughing, as I cut a small piece, and handed it to her.

"I got very little," she said, looking up quickly; "hardly a nibble, and I was very hungry." And my dear Marie looked so puzzled at these references that I had to explain everything to her on the spot.

"And you kept it all from Mademoiselle?" said the other.

"Yes, we did not want her to be troubled. We have watched here every night, for fear you should murder her in her bed."

"What a horrible thing to think of! As if I would murder anybody!" And then, at some thought within her, her face and neck dyed crimson; and it was not Hugh Myrtle she was thinking of, unless I was very much mistaken.

It was Myrtle's voice at the door, however, that said cheerfully, as he came into the room:

"Well, I don't know; it seems to me you did your very best to make an end of me, young lady."

"I have explained all that, sir, to your fhriends here. And, besides, it was you who attacked me; I acted only in self-defence. And, besides, again, if it had not been for the hrat, the hrevolver would not, I think, have gone off at all."

"The hrat?" said Myrtle.

"Yes, it got under my foot and fhrightened me, and the hrevolver went off and shot you." And at some incongruous conjunction of ideas which this set going in Myrtle's head he started laughing.

"Why do you laugh at me?" she asked, with a touch of very pretty anger.

"Oh, I'm not laughing at you, Fraulein, only at some notions your words started in my brain. That's a very bad foot; you'll have to take care of it."

"That is your work, sir," she said.

"Oh, I'll be glad to take charge of it," he said, quizzically.

"I mean, you did it."

"No," he said, looking critically at the swollen member; "I think not. I do not recognise my handiwork."

"You tied st-hrings about the next room the night before last, and I fell over them."

"The night before last," he said, "I was out all night with the ambulances, picking up wounded men."

"Ah!" she said, and her face and neck dyed red again under his look, and she was silent.

"I am sorry," she said presently, looking straight at him. "I hope you will not suffer much."

"I'll try you a race who'll be well first, Fraulein, and I'll undertake to beat you by several weeks."

"I shall be glad," she said simply.

Presently, the twisted foot being bound up in compresses, Fraulein von Marcius begged Marie to accompany her to her own room, and while they were away I got Myrtle to readjust the dressings on my back.

"Why, how did that happen?" he asked. "You ought to know enough by this time to keep a wound from breaking open, especially a wound of your own."

"Well, I couldn't leave you and the Fraulein in the cellar, you know," I said meekly; "it would not have been seemly."

"I see. I'm sorry, old chap. I suppose I am a pretty good weight when I'm stiff. It's a pity; it was healing so nicely. But we'll soon have it all right again."

"I'll take a rest till after breakfast; then I think I could get as far as the hospital. I want that bullet out of you as soon as possible."

"Yes, I'd sooner have it out than in; but I doubt if they can spare you a man at Salpétrière, they've got their hands full; and if you try it yourself you'll probably burst yourself open again. I'd sooner have one of the Americans, if you think you could manage that far; they're 'dreffle smart' after bullets."

"I'll get you Marion Ray, if he's still there; he's a clinker. He saved dear old Smartte's leg when Morin was aching to have it off."

"He's the man for me. Tell you what, Charles, that's a fine piece of girl we've discovered. Did you ever see such eyes? Blazers, aren't they? And what pluck she must have to have stopped on here; I wonder why she did it?"

"It was her brothers I met outside, and they helped me through. They're a plucky breed, I should say. Don't you go falling in love with her, or you'll have internal complications, and probably go off into a fever."

"Is that how it takes one? I believe I do feel a bit feverish," he grinned.

When we returned to the sitting-room, it suddenly struck him that, after all, we had no wine for breakfast, and we must both go down and fetch it.

"She was trying to get behind that bin," he said, holding up the candle, "when I caught sight of her, and it must have been just here that she shot me."

"This is what you came for, I suppose?" And I picked up a small revolver from the floor, and handed it to him.

"Ah, thanks. Now we'll get the wine. That's the Madeira, and here's the port. Where's that basket? I've an idea I threw it at her. That's it. Three of each will be enough for this journey. We'll take a couple of bottles of Rhine wine as well, in case the Fraulein prefers it." And between us we conveyed our liquor safely home.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FREDA VON MARCIUS.

At first we hardly recognised the two elegant young ladies who awaited us in the sitting-room. It was "Freda" and "Marie" with them by this time—by Freda's insistence, I think, as she was much the more spontaneous of the two, which perhaps, under all the circumstances of the case, was not to be wondered at. She had prevailed on Marie to let Germany repair the deficiencies of France's toilette from her own ample stores, and the result was very satisfactory, both to themselves and us. Do not tell me that handsome clothing does not enhance the charms and minister to the susceptibilities of beautiful women. No woman but feels happier and more kindly disposed to all mankind—and even to womankind, unless the latter be much better dressed than herself—when she feels that her costume is doing her justice.

I wondered much if Marie understood the nature of the business Freda had been engaged on, and from quiet observation I was inclined to think that she did, for there was a slight but unmistakable reserve in her manner which was very unusual with her. Later in the day, when we were alone together, I questioned her, and found that it was so. Freda, with the unflinching honesty of a magnanimous soul, had insisted on telling her the whole story. She would have no false pretences, she said. And while Marie acknowledged the loftiness of the ideal which prompted this, she confessed that she found it difficult to get over the thought that our new friend had been devoting all her energies—"And risking her life," I interjected—to the furnishing of information to the enemy outside, and so assisting materially in the downfall of France.

"I think it was rather fine of her to tell you, dearest. For, situated as she is, she must long for your sympathy and friendship; and in telling you she must have been aware

that she risked losing both. Suppose, now, Marie, you were in, say, Valérien, and George and his men were encamped in the rear. If you saw a Prussian division coming stealthily down on them, and they unaware of it, what would you do?"

"Warn them, of course, and as quickly as I could. Yes, I see, Charles, she has only done the same; but, still——"

"I fully sympathise, dear, with your feeling; but, remember, war is a terrible game. Her brothers were outside there; an unexpected sortie might destroy them. Could she, if she had the chance, do much less than she did? And, candidly, if she has done anything which assists in shortening these times for France by one single hour, she has done much. The end is inevitable, and the sooner it comes the better for France and for all of us."

"I fear it is so," she said mournfully. "Poor, poor France!" And thereafter the two girls became very friendly, and I was glad of it, for the companionship was good for both of them.

After breakfast I made a slow pilgrimage to the Champs Elysées—where the necessities of the times were brought home to me by the fact that they were felling the trees for fuel—and succeeded in inducing Marion Ray to come along with me, and root out the bullet from between Myrtle's shoulder-blades.

It was well in, and the extraction was somewhat painful; but he declined chloroform, as he said he wanted to see what we were doing. He had cut many a man, but had never been cut himself, and he wanted to know how it felt. It took a good deal out of him, however, and he confessed that it did not feel nice, and that chloroform was a gift of Providence. He was very quiet for the rest of the day, and Freda and Marie made up their minds that he was going to die, and were very attentive to him, with a view to smoothing his passage.

I think he would have liked to keep up that idea in their minds, but his natural activity and liveliness forbade it, and the next day he insisted on getting up and joining us at meals.

"We thought you were dying," said Freda, with a mixture of reproach and apology for their ample ministry of the previous day.

"I would like you to go on thinking so," he said; "but I can't coddle up, even when I'm dying. I always die standing or walking."

"You are an impostor," said Freda.

Marion Ray was so delighted with our *ménage* that he hinted that Hugh's case was serious enough to necessitate a resident doctor; and when that would not work he inquired our terms "en pension," and when we put them so high that he could not reach them he gravely intimated that it was not the correct thing for four young people to live together as we were doing without some elderly man to look after them; but, being cornered, confessed that he was only thirty-two, and we declined his offer on that sole ground.

Freda discouraged any discussion of the part she had been playing; but, bit by bit, we learned that she had been too ill with a low fever at the time of the investment to be removed. And her father, with no possible idea of the lengths to which the matter would run, had perforce consented to her remaining behind with her old nurse and the latter's husband, who acted as concièrge and office-keeper. After the first sortie, Freda, knowing the importance to the besiegers of information of similar attempts, boldly undertook to convey it by signals from the housetop. She constructed a code which would enlighten headquarters as to the probable locality of attack, and sent old Helm, the doorkeeper, to convey it, by hook or by crook, to its destination. That he succeeded in some way in getting through she knew by a pre-arranged signal; and thereafter she took her life in her hands, and sent out the news of each sortie as soon as she could learn its probable direction. Frau Helm had ministered to her faithfully and well, till, one day, going out into the streets on some errand, she never came back, and Freda had no idea what had become of her. Madame Two-sous' annexation of the lodge had caused her much

annoyance, but she had no difficulty in getting out through the roof, and it did not interfere with her freedom of circulation. She had lived for the most part in the top attic, where I found the copy of "Pickwick," but our usurpation of the premises, and especially of this particular sitting-room. had driven her to extremities, since all her supplies were there.

"And you have not found them," she said gaily, "or there would be a big hole in them, you hungry people." And she showed us a cunningly contrived closet in the wall between the sitting-room and the next bedroom; one of those tiny secret chambers which were common enough adjuncts to the houses of the period in which this was built—the period of intrigues and spyings and concealments. The door in the wall was fitted so delicately as to be practically invisible. It opened at touch of a button in the carved mantel, "which, however," said Freda, with a reminiscent smile, "is not too easy to find in the dark. I was there one night when one of you came in and nearly caught me. I had to light a match to find the button, and I but just slipped into the little hroom when you came in. That was the night I took some bhread, because I had other things, but no bhread. I thought if I took a little slice off each piece you would not notice it."

"Ah," said Hugh, with much enjoyment, "I had carefully measured each piece. You took exactly an inch."

"It was abominable of you," said Freda.

"If we had been introduced, and I had known you were short, I would have left you out a ration," he laughed; "but, you see, I did not know what a very nice hrat was favouring us with its attentions. It puzzled me much to know how it was trimmed so neatly."

"Now you are laughing at me," she said, "and I will heap coals of fire on your head by giving you of my store. That is good for evil." And she limped to the hearth.

"Well, I don't know," said Hugh; "you had our bread."

"Very tiny slices," she said, as she touched the button. The narrow door swung silently back, and she hopped inside

the closet, and was back in a moment with a pot of preserved meat and a glass jar of jam.

"There, Herr Myrtle," she said, "that is nicer than horse; but potted meat and jam without bhread make one feel sick, and with only meal they are not much better. There is plenty more inside there, and there is treacle-milk, any quantity, but it is sickly alone; and you are welcome to them all in exchange for your three very small, measured inches of not very good bhread."

At which, and the assumption of scorn on the pretty face, Hugh laughed aloud, and when he had served her and Marie with some of the meat he declared it the very best he had ever tasted.

"Of course it is," said Freda; "I made it myself, before I was ill. The jam also."

"Potted meat and jam are the worst things in the world for a sprained ankle," he said gravely, "and the very best things for gunshot or shell wounds. That foot of yours will never get well unless you keep it quite still. If you will show me the spring, Fraulein, I will relieve you of the necessity of hopping into that closet at all."

"And relieve me of all my good things, too, nicht wahr?"

"But you have just given them to me, Fraulein."

"Ach, well then, ghreedy! We will share them."

"I would wish for nothing better."

Among other things, she told us that Hugh and I nearly walked over her on the roof that other night. "I was c-hrouching down by the dividing wall, where the iron ladder is, when you came over; but I was under a sheet. I always wrapped myself in one when there was snow. And I peeped in one night at you two when you sat here smoking, before you began tying st-hrings about. It was so very hrude of you making free with our house like that, that I should probably have shot you if it had not been for Mademoiselle."

"Not without a hrat there, surely," said Hugh.

"Wait till I hear you t-hry to talk German, Mein Herr," she said, "and then I shall laugh at you also."

At which Myrtle broke out into a rapid flow of her

native language, which surprised me almost as much as it did Freda. Her big blue eyes shone with pleasure.

"Ah, the dear tongue," she said. "Why, you speak it very well indeed. How did you learn to speak it so well?"

"I never learnt it; it came natural. You see, we're almost German out in Java—Dutch, you know—and my mother was more German than Dutch, so I have spoken it since the day I was born."

"Ah! You are from Java, and almost German," said Freda, and she regarded him with new and benevolent interest.

I asked her if it was she who had disposed of Madame Two-Sous, or if she knew what had become of the old lady, and she answered quietly, "I did not kill her, if that is what you mean; but I did fhrighten her nearly out of her wits with my white sheet. You see, she had no hright there, any more than you had. She stood me as long as she could, and then I think she hran away."

The day after Myrtle's accident, as it was advisable for him to take things easily for a day or two, and I was the better man of the two, I made my way to the hospital, to give what assistance I could, and especially to see if George and M. Dellieu were yet in a fit state to be moved.

Dr. Morin and the rest gave me hearty welcome, and were full of regrets for Myrtle; but they all had very sober faces, and when I went into the wards I was shocked and saddened by the gaps in the ranks of those I knew. The Reaper, with his pestilential scythe, had been busy, and one after another had sickened and died, doubly regretted by their harassed attendants, since under different conditions they might have been saved.

I described to Morin all I had seen at the American ambulance in the Champs Elysées, and suggested rigging up tents in the hospital grounds, since the bombardment had materially diminished and no shells had ever come their way. He was aware of the wonderful results of the American system, but confessed, at last, that in the chaotic state of public affairs he did not know where to procure the funds

necessary for the installation. I had still a considerable sum in the hands of the American Minister, Mr. Washburne, and I offered, on Smartte's account, to provide all that was wanted. This offer he gratefully accepted, and I promised to get him the money that day. After going the rounds, and cheering up the boys as well as I could, I went up to Myrtle's room, and found George and M. Dellieu impatiently awaiting my coming and their own removal. For, well as they were attended to, they found it dreary work lying there, and having heard from Hugh of our sumptuous quarters they were keen to share them.

With Dr. Morin's consent, I procured a carriage then and there, though not without difficulty, and surprised our friends in the Rue de la Monnaie by suddenly landing these two new patients in their midst.

We introduced Fraulein von Marcius simply as the daughter of the proprietor of the house, and our hostess, and I strongly advised Marie and Hugh, and Freda herself, to make no mention of other matters, lest the harmony of our circle should be endangered.

Then I took my hardly-discovered carriage on to the American Legation, and was fortunate enough to find Mr. Washburne there, hearty and cheerful as usual, but, as he confessed to me, exceedingly sick of the whole business, and anxious only, since the end was inevitable, to see it come as speedily as possible.

"Paris is ruining the whole country," he said, with much emphasis, "and doing herself no good. France is licked down to the ground, and the sooner she knuckles under and starts building afresh the better. It's been a mighty big clearing, but events have proved that it was needed."

I told him what I wanted the money for, and he cordially approved, and asked after Smartte, of whom I had, of course, no fresh news to give him.

About the ambulances he said, "Our boys cut their eye-teeth in our own war, and what they don't know about gunshot wounds and pyæmia, and everything else of the kind, is not much worth knowing. If I can be of any service to you, let me know."

"Will it last much longer, do you think, sir?" I asked him.

"God knows," he said. "I never expected they'd hold out half the time, but I don't think the people outside will let it go on much longer. If it's bad for us inside, it's bad for them too—terribly wearing work all round. No, I don't think it can go on very much longer, and the sooner it ends the better."

I drove back to the Salpétrière, and spent the rest of a busy day getting things into shape for coping with the Scytheman; and, to make an end of that, I may say that after the first week of keeping the pyæmia cases under canvas, well warmed but well ventilated, we never lost a man.

When I got back home I found the enlarged family anxiously awaiting my return. I could hardly help smiling at the mixture of incongruous elements of which it was composed.

Captain George, sombre and silent, as was but natural, but visibly glad to be in such comfortable quarters; M. Dellieu, gravely cheerful under the pain of his wounds, and very grateful for every attention; Marie, just her own sweet self, clouded with the sadness that hung over her country, but active in ministry to all and sundry; Freda von Marcius, full of exultation at the new-born prowess of her country, visibly tuning her mood with some difficulty lest it should strike discord with her surroundings, and not altogether sorry now, I think, that her accident disabled her from further active participation in the war; Hugh Myrtle, hugely enjoying his enforced holiday, and the cause and causer of it, with whom he spoke English or French at meals, and gabbled sonorous incomprehensibilities in quiet corners by way of relaxation.

For myself, I was very grateful and completely happy at the restoration of my dear girl, with so little sign now of the trials through which she had come. I was completely happy in the present, and full of hope for the future; and mercifully the future was hidden from me.

I could see no reason why our marriage, so sadly inter-

rupted on the last occasion, should not now be carried out. Marie was quite willing. I discussed the matter with George and M. Dellieu, and they fully approved. When Freda von Marcius heard of it, she was as eager for it as if it had been her own wedding. And Hugh Myrtle privately informed me that if I would wait a short time we might perhaps manage a double event, as he intended to marry Freda, who was—next to Ma'm'selle Marie, he diplomatically explained—the nicest girl in the world. I wished him luck, but declined to wait. From every point of view it seemed good that we should wed at once, and, subject to the procuring of a complaisant mayor or registrar, it was so decided.

The official difficulties dispersed before a letter which George gave me to a friend of his, one Captain Derennes, whom I found at the Louvre in attendance on General Vinoy, whose star seemed somewhat in the ascendant.

Captain Derennes proved to be our visitant of the morning which followed our adventures on the housetop. He was delighted to see me again, and to hear good news of his friend's recovery.

"We want him back badly," he said, "arms or no arms. He had more influence over these wild Breton cattle than any man we've had; he could talk to them in their own ghastly patois, and they liked him. And you are to marry Mdlle. de Kerhuel, M. Glyn? That was the charming demoiselle I met that morning, was it not? I congratulate you. I'll find you a registrar, and if he offers any objections I'll make his hair stand up or come off. The times do not permit of standing on ceremony in matters of moment. You will permit me to assist also?"

"I was going to venture to ask if your duties would permit of it, M. le Capitaine."

"They are flexible. Things are going to the devil," he said bitterly. "We have too many cooks, and the soup is in the fire. When is it to be, Monsieur?"

"The sooner the better. Shall we say to-morrow at five o'clock?"

"Understood! I will be there with the little official, and I assure you in advance that he will do just what I tell him."

And we parted the best of friends.

My news of the time fixed for the ceremony set more pots than one a-boiling. Marie and Freda had their heads together at once, and were thenceforward unapproachable by ordinary human men.

After much confabulation, they bore down upon me, however, as the forefront of the offence and the principal cause of all their agitations, and peremptorily ordered me to procure bread for the company to-morrow. Briefly put, the ultimatum amounted to this—no bread, no wedding; and bread I vowed there should be, if I had to make it myself, at which they raised their hands in horror.

I consulted the men, and George again brushed aside our difficulties by asserting that he was entitled to rations during the next ten days, which he had set as the limit of his convalescence, and he promised me another letter to Captain Derennes on the morrow which would procure both bread and meat. So that cloud was dissipated, and the ladies retired in good order to Freda's apartment to wrestle with other and more intricate matters, into which we lower mortals were not allowed to intrude by even so much as a question.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ROSEMARY.

At five o'clock on the following day Marie and I stood once more before the registrar and M. Dellieu to be married, and in my heart I prayed fervently that this time there might be no intervention of the fates.

My dear girl was pale with excitement, which under the circumstances was not to be wondered at, but she looked supremely lovely, and if the sweet face was tremulous with emotion, the large dark eyes shone steadfast as faithful twin stars.

Fraulein von Marcius had evidently flung wide the doors of a generous wardrobe for their joint benefit, and by contrast with their radiant attire we men looked and felt painfully shabby and threadbare. But our garments had been worn out by honourable service in a good cause, and in our hearts we were conscious of duty well done. Still, no matter how one's heart may swell with pride of performance, clothes do count for something when one is attending one's own wedding.

The registrar, whom Captain Derennes had brought with him, according to contract, and in a fit and proper state of mind, glanced at the ladies and then at the bridegroom, and seemed a trifle doubtful whether so charming a bride was not committing some dreadful *faux pas* in wedding so dilapidated an object. He was too polite to say anything, however, and, besides, he was little better furnished himself. When he heard that I was an Englishman he gave a slight shrug, as much as to say, "Ah, that accounts for it." And I have no doubt he has lived ever since in the conviction that the English make a rule of marrying in their oldest clothes from motives of economy, or possibly from simple lack of knowing any better.

The official ceremony is very short and simple, but it was not until the registrar had asked me,

"Do you, M. Charles Glyn, declare that you take for wife Mdlle. Marie de Kerhuel here present?" and I had replied, "I do";

And until he had asked Marie,

"Do you, Mdlle. Marie de Kerhuel, declare that you take for husband M. Charles Glyn here present?" and Marie had sweetly answered, "I do";

And he had said, "In the name of the law I declare that M. Charles Glyn and Mdlle. Marie de Kerhuel are united by marriage"—not until then did I feel quite certain that some untoward event would not yet come between us.

But when this much was safely accomplished I began to feel easier in my mind, and was able to listen to M. Dellieu's gentle exhortations with equanimity and proper attention. In his benediction he referred very touchingly to the sadness of the times we were passing through, and prayed that for all of us the end might be better than the beginning.

And so, at last, my dear girl and I were truly made one; and under the influence of the wedding feast—which would have looked slim enough in ordinary times, but in these days was a thing to remember in one's dreams—the spirits of the whole party rose, and in spite of the gloom and desolation without, and the monotonous boom of the distant guns, we became almost merry. And, indeed, it was enough to provoke Homeric laughter to see the unconscious Captain Derennes paying assiduous court to Freda von Marcius, whom but a few nights before he had been malevolently hunting over the housetops, and whom he would most certainly have shot like a dog had he caught her. The whimsicality of it all was evidently in Freda's mind too, for she excelled herself in merry audacity, and played the warrior like a half-hooked fish; while Hugh Myrtle, fearless of the captain as a rival, watched the proceedings with an enjoyment that at times left him almost speechless. The only unlively member of the company was George, but his sombre gravity seemed to sit so naturally upon him that it excited no surprise. Knowing what I did, I did not believe

that his mood would ever lighten. He had taken on his shoulders a burden which he must carry to the grave.

Our wedding journey was limited to a trip down the corridor, and when at the last I knelt by the side of my wife in the sanctuary of our chamber the gratitude that was in me could find no expression, for the overfull heart can never clothe its deepest thoughts in uncouth words.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WILLOW.

For three happy days our new life flowed smooth and deep, and crystal-clear as the rivers that run through the celestial fields, and all our friends rejoiced in our happiness.

Freda especially, with the deep sentiment of a true-hearted German girl, delighted in us beyond even her powers of expression. Her great blue eyes beamed upon us like beneficent suns as she lay and enjoyed us, and I have no doubt that her sympathetic observation of us inclined her heart towards the devotion which, even at this early stage of their acquaintance, gleamed from Hugh Myrtle's eyes whenever he looked at her, and of which I could see she was not unconscious.

In talking over these old times I have said as much to Hugh, but he tells me we had nothing whatever to do with it, and that he won his prize off his own bat entirely.

Then, in the fulness of her accomplished happiness, my dear Marie must seek larger outlet of good works for the spirit that was in her. Could one blame her? She was brimming with the gladness of life, and she must fain share it with others less well furnished.

Our invalids were all convalescing, and needed little attention. The suffering outside was intense in certain directions—especially among the women and children, and again most especially among the very little children. They clung—cold, hungry, and utterly miserable—to their starving mothers, and dropped away from them like frozen berries from a withered bush.

Is it to be wondered at that my dear girl's heart was drawn towards these little ones, and that the light of her own new happiness was overcast somewhat by their long-drawn sufferings?

She came to me one day radiant with an inspiration. The babies outside were dying of hunger. Milk was not to be

had for love or money, but there was a considerable supply of this new preserved milk in Freda's closet; and there was meal. Out of these things, surely it was possible to concoct a food that would help to keep alight these feeble sparks of life.

We consulted Freda, and she plunged into the project with all her usual impulsiveness.

"Treacle-milk!" she said. "There is heaps and heaps of it downstairs in the cellar. A great many cases came from Switzerland for a man here, and he did not pay, and it was put into my father's hands until he did. It is probably gone bad by this time. What I have upstairs is not that same; but for me, I do not like it, it is too sweet and slimy. It tastes like sweet mud."

Following her indications, I went downstairs at once to the cellar, and found a score of cases full of the little round tins. I took some up with me to see if they were all right, and found them excellent.

As the result of a general discussion on the subject, we experimented with various mixtures of meal and water and "treacle-milk," as Freda persisted in calling it, all boiled up together, and finally hit upon a concoction wherein the meal and water were first boiled into a very thin gruel, and the treacle-milk added as it cooled. This gave us a liquid no thicker than ordinary milk and water, slightly sweet in taste, and full of nutriment. And as soon as we decided that it was exactly right, nothing would satisfy Marie but she must put some into a jug, and carry it forthwith to some of the first babies she could find; and I, of course, accompanied her.

There was no difficulty in finding hungry babies. Many must have died, but there were plenty left. We came upon a thin, pale slip of a girl, sitting on a doorstep not twenty yards from our own house. She could not have been more than seventeen, I should say; but she had a tiny, puling siege-baby at her breast under her thin shawl, and it was whining pitifully.

"Mon dieu, mon dieu! Petite," we heard her say as we

drew close, "you have had all I have got, and I can do no more; no, not unless you eat me, you poor little devil."

"I have got some warm food here for the little one," said Marie, stopping before her. "Will you try it?"

"Will I? Won't I? Anything to fill her stomach, and keep her quiet. She drives me crazy with her mewing."

She gave the baby a spoonful, and its small black eyes opened wide with surprise, and it clutched wildly for the spoon, and licked its lips like a kitten at the first taste of the saucer. In ten minutes it was lying fast asleep in its mother's arms, with a full stomach, and more content in its face than it had probably worn for months.

"She is pretty, isn't she?" asked the mother; but added, as an afterthought, "when she's not crying."

"If you will come in the morning at ten o'clock to No. 1, Rue de la Monnaie, and bring a bottle, I will give you enough for all day," said Marie.

"Oh, Madame!" gasped the little mother. "The good God bless you! I am worn out, you see; and not enough to feed one won't feed two." And we went on.

That jugful gave a foretaste of joys to come to a round dozen starvelings, and Marie returned home to report to Freda, with swimming eyes and broken voice because of the things she had seen during our pilgrimage.

They were up betimes, brewing an adequate supply of "Marie's mixture," as Freda called it, and at ten o'clock we carried it down in bowls and jugs to the concièrge's room in the tunnel-way.

There were full twenty women waiting, with babies and bottles, when we opened the little door in the big wooden gate. We filled their bottles, and most of them fed their babies on the spot, while the stuff was still warm, since heating it was impossible to most of them.

The next day there were quite thirty there, for the news was too good to be kept to themselves, and Freda insisted on hopping downstairs to enjoy the fun. And rich enjoyment it was to see the beady black eyes in the sunken little faces light up and fix intently on the spoons, and the little claw-

fingers grabbing for them, and the look of contentment that came over them, body and soul, as the soothing food crept into the empty stomachs, and filled the windy voids, and gave them peace. So shrivelled and dirty were most of them that verily they looked more like monkeys than babies; yet the hearts of those two fair girls yearned over them, and even the rest of us were filled with compassion, though I do not think we others would have cared much to handle them. If vociferous motherly blessings could avail for our future happiness, assuredly it would be ours, for this thing touched those gaunt, wild-eyed, trailing-haired women as greater ones might not have done.

Our numbers increased daily as the news spread. By the end of the first week we were feeding close on a hundred babies, and among their mothers were some of the wildest specimens of womankind that ever I set eyes on. For the most part they were quiet in their behaviour, though loud enough in their gratitude; but some of them were clamorous and impatient, and apparently regarded our dole in the light of a rightful due. These were troublesome, pushing creatures, and the others regarded them with disfavour, and did not hide their feelings; so that at times the tunnel-way was resonant with angry voices and the crying of terrified children, and we had to exert our authority to keep the peace. But, after all, they all had half-starved children with them, and their own sufferings had been, and still were, of the bitterest, and as yet there was no sign of the end. Under such circumstances one could surely forgive much.

All this time our better-class relief in the neighbourhood of the hospital had been steadily carried on, in spite of the unfortunate circumstances which had interfered with our direct personal supervision of it. The loss of Madame of the Lion d'Or and Lotte was a heavy blow, and disorganised our operations for a day or two; but Myrtle had succeeded in finding fairly efficient substitutes for them, and the spirit of pride which had at first restrained many from coming for the assistance we were only too glad to be able to offer them, had gradually given way before the pangs of actual starva-

tion. It became enough, at last, to give an order on our almoner, and she supplied the necessary food each day when they came for it.

But now that I could get about again I spent most of the day round the hospital and the new canvas ward, and among the proud and needy ones of the district. I rejoice to think that many hopeless lives were cheered during those dark days by the means which our good friend Smartte had so liberally provided.

My custom was to help Marie and Freda with their distribution, and keep such order as was possible among the more rowdy members of the throng, and then go on to my other duties. And always I bore about with me, no matter how bitter the weather, the recollection of the faces of those two girls, flushed, radiant, transfigured almost, though their beauty could hardly be heightened, by the joy of this new ministry.

We were all absolutely happy in our work. I scoured the land for meal. Hugh pounded it to finest powder in a big mortar we discovered in the kitchen, and prepared all the ingredients for each day's brew. In the early morning it was all hands to the kettle. M. Dellieu became a past master in the art of opening condensed milk tins. Captain George's one arm did excellent service with a huge wooden spoon stirring the mixture, and he developed a fine taste and nice discrimination as to the proper consistency of baby gruel. And the two bright-faced girls ordered us all about to their heart's content, and chided us gaily for faults that we wotted not of.

We were all absolutely happy—and then the blow fell. So terrible, so fiendish, so utterly undeserved, from so unexpected a quarter; my soul sickens even now at the remembrance of it.

The babies' distribution was over for the day. The street outside was full of men marching stolidly westwards, and the guns rumbled heavily over the asphalt. Another sortie, I supposed; and I stood for a moment in the gateway as a body of National Guards went past in their showy new

uniforms, which contrasted, I thought, very discreditably with the war-worn rags of the Line who came behind. Then I went upstairs with some of the impedimenta, leaving the girls to their regular task of clearing up the lodge for the next day.

I had washed, and stood for a few minutes chatting gaily with the convalescents up above, when suddenly shriek upon shriek, blood-curdling, pregnant of the greatest horror, came ringing up from the courtyard, and chilled the blood in our veins.

My ears were still tingling with them when I got down to the yard. Freda stood there with her face twisted out of shape, in a very frenzy of agony. I ran past her to the lodge, and my heart sickened and broke at the sight I saw there.

On the floor by the table lay Marie, my wife of one short week, bathed in blood, with a table-knife still sticking hideously between her shoulders. White and motionless she lay, like a fair, martyred saint, with one pale cheek flat against the trampled boards, and the other glimmering wanly up at me; and that numb thing that had been my heart a moment before groaned agonies unutterable. For a moment I stood. All the life in me seemed to come to a dead stand too. The white face swam before my eyes. Then slowly my heart took up its burden again, with dull, heavy stabs of pain and protest at being so driven. That my dear one was dead I had no shadow of doubt.

Then, automatically I think, the surgeon in me dropped on his knees beside her, and drew out that hideous knife—ah, my God! Shall I ever lose the feel and the sight of it?—out of my darling's flesh, with her life-blood curling on the blade, and dropping in bright red clots on to her morning dress.

Then, with all the earth rolling round me in furious red billows, I was climbing the stairs, with that dear body pressed close to my breast, and my mind a hopeless red blotch. They came crowding to meet me, with white, stricken faces. Their faces all rolled into one, and someone relieved me of my burden just as I stumbled and fell.

When I came to myself I was on the couch in the sitting-room, and M. Dellieu was beside me.

As soon as he saw my eyes open he leaned over me, and said slowly and distinctly, "Dear lad, by God's great mercy, she is not dead!" And my heart began to beat again, slowly and heavily, and with pain.

"Is there hope?" I gasped.

"There is hope, and M. Myrtle is doing everything possible. Join me, my son!" And he fell on his knees by the couch, and prayed, simply and fervently, that that precious life might be spared to us. It was but a few words, but the whole heart of a good man was in them, and they soothed and comforted me, and lifted me to the only possible source of help in so dire a calamity.

"She is in the hands of God, my boy," he said, still kneeling by me, with a face full of the deepest sympathy. "His hands are the hands of love, and I have infinite faith in His power and willingness to help."

"God help us," I groaned, as all the horror of it came surging back upon me.

"Amen!" he said gently, and then, strangely, bent down and kissed my brow.

He would not let me go to her, and when I tried to sit up I found myself weak and trembling as with an ague.

But presently George came softly in, and confirmed the good news that there were grounds for hope.

"It is a dreadful cut," he said, "but Myrtle says it missed the heart by a hair's breadth. He has stopped the flow, and bids you hope."

"Thank God!" I breathed; and, "Dieu merci!" said M. Dellieu fervently.

It was a time of dreadful suspense for us all, and for me of direst agony, illuminated only by that higher hope which M. Dellieu's fervent words had implanted in me.

I learned more in those dark hours than all my life had taught me before. For the scales dropped from my soul, and it lay in the dust, bare before God, and cried aloud in voiceless prayers for the life that was infinitely dearer than my own.

But of these matters, as I have said, one does not speak; words are helpless, and worse than useless.

And if it was a time of stress and agony for us, who could only look dumbly on and do our feeble best to soothe her pain, what must it have been to that sweet and patient sufferer on the crimsoned bed?

They let me see her in the evening, when a little strength was returning to her. Ah, me! Let me say, rather, when a little abatement in the loss of vital power was apparent. Her sweet eyes opened on me, and the ghost of a smile glimmered on her white lips as I knelt by the bed and kissed the little blue-veined hand that lay on the coverlet, and sobbed, "Oh, my dearest, my wife, my love!"

And then they drew me away, thankful for that much; grateful from the bottom of my heart and in every fibre of my being that it was what was, and not what might have been, that lay there, so very like to death, but mercifully still alive.

I cannot tell you how I lived through those days of alternate hopes and fears. In them I learned to the full the bitter ache and agony of the bursting heart and the tied hand. I would have given my life to ease her pain, and I could do nothing but sit and wait and hope, and dumbly pray. There were grey hairs in my head before they were past. My wife calls them her hairs, and has a special affection for them.

The first time I sat at table, and saw a large knife similar to the one I plucked out of my wife's back, I shivered as though one walked over my grave, as the old wives say, and it was months before I dared to handle probe or lancet. In a word, it had shaken me down to the roots, and I am not ashamed to acknowledge it.

It was long before I heard from Freda the details of the matter. One of the turbulent women had come in late, after all the rest had gone home, and when all the food had been distributed. She had her baby on her arm. She demanded food for it, and grew insolent and angry. So very insolent did she become at last that Freda ordered her out.

My dear girl, thinking only of the starving child, told the furious mother to be quiet, and she would see if any more food was obtainable. She had turned to leave the room, when the fiend snatched up the knife that lay on the table, and plunged it into her, and then fled out through the gateway into the street.

It was impossible to stop the distribution because of the dastardly crime. The children were starving just the same, and if Marie had been in her grave it would have troubled her to think of them starving on her account. So the work went on as before, and never a child went short, so far as we were concerned. But after that fatal morning we men took the matter in hand, and when the women heard the reason their curses on the author of the catastrophe were both loud and deep, and if they had known who she was it would have gone hardly with her. But we knew neither her name nor where she lived, and the child, I fear, went starving because of its mother's act.

Of matters outside I have no recollection whatever. Marie lay, white and uncomplaining, between life and death, and my thoughts were only and wholly for her.

It was the end of the month before we could dare to say that, unless some unforeseen complications ensued, her life was out of danger. The recovery would be slow and tedious, but so long as it was recovery nothing else mattered.

That same day we heard that the armistice was agreed upon, and the war practically over.

So two long agonies came to an end together.

But, writing now in the light of after events, I can see that Marie and her country were in much the same plight, and that complications were as possible in the one as in the other.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SLOWLY AND SURELY.

THAT month of February was a time of great trial to us all. The strain on heart and mind was so unrelaxing, and the vigilance to note and weigh to its possible consequences every slightest change and symptom so great, that we were all too overworn with our work indoors to pay much attention to what went on outside. But, as a matter of fact, nothing visibly was going on there, I believe, beyond the revictualling of the city, and the exodus from it of all who had the means to go and any place to go to.

George, as soon as he was sufficiently recovered, returned to his duties, minus one arm, and was immediately appointed aide-de-camp on the staff of Vinoy, now military governor of Paris, and accorded the rank of colonel. The grim irony of it all appealed to him strongly I could see, but he remained sombre and grave as ever. He had done his best to lose himself, and, instead, had found honour and promotion.

I am quite sure that, from certain points of view, he regretted most bitterly the tragedy that had, quite unintentionally, set his feet on the ladder. On the other hand, I am certain that under similar circumstances he would have done the same thing again. I am not here to judge him. His anxiety on Marie's behalf was as great as our own, and rarely a day passed, so long as he remained in the city, without his coming in for our latest news concerning her.

I wrote home, giving an account of all that had befallen us, but advising them not to act on what I knew would be their first impulses in the way of coming to our assistance, since every possible thing that could be done was being done, and the country, I knew, must still be in a state of chaos.

The replies I received from Madame de Kerhuel and my mother and Smartte were full of congratulations on our

marriage, of deepest sympathy for this latest calamity, and of proffers of help as soon as I would permit it.

Smartte's letter characteristically enclosed a draft on the Bank of France for ten thousand francs, with instructions to spare it not for the benefit of all concerned; but I still had some of his money left, and did not require it, though it was good to know that in using that money for Marie and ourselves I was acting in accordance with his wishes.

Freda, too, got into communication with her people. Her elder brother Leo, whom I had met at Villeneuve, congratulated her warmly on her patriotic and risky work, and on now being in such good hands. He had come through without a scratch, and Heinrich was all right at home. He sent me good wishes and sympathy. From her father she received funds, and a suggestion that she should join him in Cassel as soon as she felt at liberty to do so, as he would not return to Paris till things got fully settled again, which he believed would not be for some considerable time.

Hugh Myrtle kept his ears pricked up whenever Freda discoursed on home matters, to learn if there was any other in the field of her affections, for one could see with half an eye that, in spite of his devoted attention to Marie, he was head over ears in love with the blue-eyed German girl. And, if we could perceive it with half an eye, there could not be a moment's doubt that Freda's blazing lamps had looked into his heart long since.

M. Dellieu remained with us to share our vigils, and right glad we were of his hopeful companionship and assistance.

So that dark month of February drew to a close, and whatever news we heard came chiefly from George. We were seldom abroad, for all our hearts and thoughts were focussed on the patient sufferer on the bed in that quiet room next to our sitting-room.

In this way we heard, as of happenings in a distant land, of the disbanding of the Mobiles, who were only too glad to get back to their ruined farms and wonted pursuits; of the disarming, according to the armistice, of the men of the

Line, while the frothy National Guards were allowed to retain their little-used weapons in full—a proceeding which moved Colonel George to deepest wrath and disgust. He said they had got completely out of hand, and though they had shown themselves of little account during the siege, and did nothing but drink and brag and draw their pay, it was sheer imbecility to leave them practically the only armed body in the city.

Then we heard of the formal triumphal walk-over of the German troops through the Champs Elysées, and from our roof, where we took the air occasionally, saw signs of the mourning assumed by our volatile neighbours for the occasion.

That, however, did not last long. The conquerors were soon gone back to their entrenchments, and Paris, purged and purified outwardly from the contamination, and inwardly rotten to the core, was to all appearances herself again.

We heard, too, how the people had carried away the cannons from the Parc Monceau to the heights of Montmartre, lest the all-devouring Prussians should seize them; and that same day, when Myrtle returned from a foraging expedition, he remarked that things did not look comfortable outside. The streets were crowded, he said, with riff-raff of all kinds, disbanded Linesmen, Francs-tireurs, and scum generally; and there were red placards on the walls, signed by Blanqui, Flourens, and other extremists, calling on such of the regulars as were left for the preservation of order to desert and join the people.

Then we heard, through George, of the meeting of the newly elected National Assembly at Bordeaux, and the nomination of M. Thiers as head of the State. He told us, with a gloomy face, that they had decided to meet next at Versailles, because of the disturbed state of Paris consequent on the machinations of the Comité Central of the National Guard and the International Association of Workers, two effervescent bodies whose chief desire was for troubled waters wherein to fish.

And my only thought concerning any of these matters was whether they would occasion any turmoil in the city which might disturb Marie. For, day after day, and night after night, she lay there, silent for the most part and uncomplaining, while Nature slowly, so very slowly, pieced together again the ghastly severances, and repaired the ravages, of that murderous knife.

But surely, if slowly, the great healer did her work. We were able to rejoice in a daily accession of strength, and when, at last, the first tinge of colour showed in the pale cheeks we greeted it with acclaim and held high festival.

Then, having helped us much in more ways than he knew, our good friend M. Dellieu thought it time to return to his own home, to pick up any stray threads of work that might be left to him, and we missed him greatly.

So, day by day, my dear girl drew back to life; and, night by night, the desperadoes who held Paris in their grip, being foredoomed by the gods to destruction, waxed madder and madder in their dealings. And out at Versailles the Government was working might and main, as surely and slowly as Nature herself; but all too slowly to save the city from the holocaust that was preparing for her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SWELLING OF THE RED FLOOD.

One afternoon Hugh and I, with Freda in close attendance, carried Marie in a chair to the top storey, and helped her slowly up the spiral iron stairs to the roof. Our exertions needed no thanks, but had they done so they would have been amply repaid by her eager enjoyment of the soft May air and sunshine.

The streets were full of tumult as usual. The people were flocking in thousands towards the Louvre and Tuileries, and we heard the shouts and clamour of a mighty gathering somewhere in that direction.

We were still looking that way, and wondering what was the cause of the concourse, when Hugh sprang suddenly to the ladder on the dividing wall, crying, "Good Lord! Look! The Napoleon Column!" And even as our eyes rested on it we saw the great bronze column, towering high above all its surroundings, move, sway, dip, and silently disappear below the neighbouring roofs, while from the place where it had stood there came a roar like the voice of many wild beasts.

"Well!" he said. "What next? They are all gone stark, staring, crazy mad." And the girls' faces were pale with emotion.

George was much in our thoughts, and somewhat heavy on our hearts. It was six weeks since we had seen him. He had told us not to be surprised if he did not come, and we knew that all intercourse between Versailles and the city was out of question; so we could only hope for the best. I could see that the matter gave Marie much anxiety, but it was out of my power to allay it, except by the utterance of commonplaces which gave no satisfaction even to myself.

The streets were filled every day now with so tumultuous a rabble that it seemed as much as any man's life was worth to venture outside the doorway. But fresh food we had to

get, and Myrtle and I took it in turns to go out for it, though he did his utmost to persuade me to let him do it all.

On one such occasion I was pounced upon, along with other peaceable wayfarers, by a patrol of more or less drunken National Guards, and driven across to the Hôtel de Ville, and forced to work piling up stones on a barricade. I was verily working for my life, sweating and grimy, and at the same time looking warily for a chance of escape, when an officer came along on a horse, to which he did not seem over well accustomed. He drew rein and watched us, and then, singling me out, either by my dress or my face, manœuvred his steed up to me and said:

"Who are you? No Frenchman, I'll bet."

"No, Monsieur; I am an Englishman," I said.

"Ah! Allons! Down with the Englishmen! What are you doing here?"

"As you see, Monsieur, some of these—gentlemen with guns forced me to this occupation, which I can assure you is most uncongenial."

"You are doubtless a spy from Versailles."

"Not at all, I am a surgeon. I have been working with the Salpétrière ambulances all through the siege."

"Eh bien, we will relieve you of further service."

"I thank you, Monsieur!" And I threw down the stone I was carrying.

But his idea of relief and mine were by no means the same.

"Garron!" he called to a sergeant who stood by. "Take four men, and shoot him, and drop him in the river. The city is full of spies."

"Stay, Monsieur!" I cried. "I tell you I am a surgeon attached to one of your own ambulances. My papers prove it, and I have never left the city since September."

"Go to the devil!" he shouted. "Garron! Your duty."

Garron's truculent four closed round me, and I thought my last minute had come. But just at that critical moment

another officer came up hot-foot with some message from the Hôtel de Ville to him on the horse, which started him off so suddenly that he nearly lost his seat; and as the newcomer caught sight of me he ran up with both hands outstretched, crying:

"Comment, Monsieur, we meet again. What is this, then?" And I recognised young Lepine, who had been in our hands at the hospital—the young fellow I had found in the gravel-pit at Champigny.

"They want to shoot me as a spy," I said, as coolly as I could, though I was in a great state of perturbation; "if you can prevent it, I shall be much obliged to you."

"Oh, tschutt! What folly! Allez, Garron, mon gars, this gentleman is a personal friend of my own, and no more a spy than you are. Go, I tell you; I will be answerable for him. Mon dieu!" he cried hotly. "If you hesitate, I will cut you down."

Lepine wore a captain's uniform, and the grim sergeant scowled and went.

"I am delighted to be of service to Monsieur," said Lepine. "Mon dieu! What times we are in, and what animals we have to deal with. Come with me, Monsieur. Where are you stopping?"

I told him, and endeavoured to express my feelings, which were in considerable tumult. He convoyed me to my own door, and adjured me to keep strictly inside it.

"Matters are coming to a head," he said. "A very few days will decide who is on top; but those feeble people at Versailles are to blame in the first place."

So a portion of the bread scattered on the waters returned to me; and later on there was more to follow, and again it was young Lepine who bore it.

I said nothing of this little adventure to the girls, but held it up to Myrtle as a warning.

That night, and all night long, there was furious cannonading in the west, and as soon as it was light we went up to the roof to see what was going on.

Presently the heavy guns ceased booming. From time

to time the crackle of musketry broke out in the western suburbs, but it seemed almost as though the popular enjoyment of the Sabbath fête was not to be disturbed by any serious fighting. Afterwards we knew that the Versailles army was quietly entering the city at that side, which their artillery had practically cleared of inhabitants—guards or others. Later on, the streets below us were crowded with citizens and citizenesses dressed in their best, all thronging towards the west, where the bands were playing in the Tuileries Gardens as they always did on Sundays.

Paris that day looked as little like a City of Destruction as any city well could do, but all the elements of destruction were there. The Devil was couchant, but he was not by any means dead. That night was comparatively quiet, but Myrtle was tapping at my door in the early morning to give me the great news that the tricolor was floating on the Arc de Triomphe, and we knew that the Government troops were in the city.

We spent pretty nearly all that day on the roof. It was a typical, soft May day. The sun shone brilliantly, and our dear convalescent lay in her chair behind the stone balustrade, and drank in the strength and sweetness of the spring; and I sat by her side, and rejoiced in the light in her eyes, and the novel touch of colour in the pale cheeks. Hugh and Freda patrolled the roof, or sat, or lounged; full content with one another's company, but condescending, now and again, to favour us elders with a non-personal remark, just to show there was no ill-will, and that we were not absolutely forgotten.

West and south the musketry crackled incessantly. The contrast between our quiet look-out and the work that was going on over there gave one food for thought.

"Are we safe here, Charles?" asked Marie.

"Quite safe, dear"—I hoped it was so, and wished her to believe so too—"and I hope soon we shall be safer still, and then we will go right away home."

"Home!" she said softly. "I hardly hoped to see home again. And my dear mother, and my father, and your dear

mother. Oh, how happy I shall be to see them all again! I am just a little afraid of meeting my father, you know; I fear it will be painful."

"Not to him, at all events, my dear. The sight of you will make him feel richer than ever, and you will very soon get over your shyness when you see his eyes light up at sight of you."

"I would so like to go on living at Kerhuel, Charles; that will always be home to me."

"We-ll!" I said quizzically.

"I mean—you know what I mean. It is the dearest place in the world to me—as yet."

"Boom!" said Hugh, suddenly jumping up from Freda's side, and gazing out over the parapet. "See that, Charles! Montmartre is firing into the city towards the Champs Elysées. I hope the gentlemen of the Government will put a stopper on that before the Red men retreat this way, or they may crack us up by mistake."

"They'll stop it all right," I said, to quiet Marie's fears. "As soon as the Reds find they are getting the worst of it, you'll see they'll fall to pieces, and each man will look after himself. Marie and I were just discussing what train we'd take home. You'll come with us, Freda, won't you? Then we're sure of Hugh, you know," I added pointedly.

"I would like to, oh, so much!" said Freda, colouring finely, and looking at Hugh for assistance. "But——"

"But first we must go up to Cassel to see papa," said Hugh, beaming all over.

Marie stretched out a thin white hand to Freda, and drew her down and kissed her, and murmured softly, "I am so glad, dear; you will be very happy. Hugh is all good." And I gripped my friend's hand, and said nothing, by way of telling him all I felt.

"She has promised never to shoot me again," said Hugh, "unless I——"

"Monster!" cried Freda, striking at him with her hand. "You are to forget all about it, or I——"

"I've forgotten," cried Hugh; "but I do delight to think about it. It was such a thoroughly unique way of

getting into a man's heart. The very newest German method, I expect. Hello! That sounds closer."

"That" was the heavy guns in the Place de la Concorde firing up the Champs Elysées, and from that time on Concorde and Montmartre thundered away with never a pause.

Below us, and all round, the streets soon became like a gigantic ant-heap with the top knocked off. Every available bell was clashing the tocsin. Drums were beating madly. Every street swarmed thick with crowding Nationals, and women, and children. Mounted messengers strove in vain to force their way through the press, and behind them came others with probably contradictory orders. It was panic, it was bedlam let loose. I advised keeping back from the parapet, lest the sight of our safety should spur their sense of danger into reprisals. Down at the end of a street opposite, a belated barricade was being hastily flung together—carts, stones, bedsteads and bedding, tables, chairs, anything and everything—men, women, and children toiling as though for dear life.

"This is the beginning of the end!" I said didactically.

"Oh, wise young prophet!" said Hugh. "The remark, however, is somewhat belated. The end began when that flag showed out on the arch there. I wish they'd begin to fall to pieces as quickly as possible, and get it over; it's rather horrible, you know. Fighting in the streets is somehow more awful than it is in the open; it strikes one as unnatural and unseemly."

We took the girls down at last, and in spite of all attempts at cheerfulness the situation of affairs outside weighed upon us, and forebodings were not wanting.

Myrtle and I kept watch in turns on the roof all night, and all night long the guns of Montmartre showered shot and shell into the western parts of the city.

About the middle of the following day the firing in that direction culminated in a continuous terrific roar, and then suddenly ceased. There was heavy musketry, however, round the Place de la Concorde and the Madeleine, and across the river on the south side of the city.

"What does that mean?" said Hugh.

"The Verstilles people have won the hill, or it would go on firing," I suggested. And presently the conjecture proved correct, for shells began screaming across at Montmartre from the Buttes Chaumont and Père-la-Chaise, which lay behind us, so to speak, but well away to the right.

"I hope to God they'll keep away from here," said Hugh, getting a little flustered. "We're too near that damned Hôtel de Ville for my liking; it's the Reds' nest, and the others are sure to go for it."

While we were looking west, a sudden puff of black smoke shot up among the buildings near the Place de la Concorde, and following it came mighty tongues of flame, which shone strangely vicious in the May sunshine.

"Something's on fire," said Hugh; "and a pretty big blaze too."

It was a great line of fire—it looked like a whole street. It was, in fact, the whole Rue Royale, fired by Brunel to act as a barrier between himself and General Douay's forces, which had just taken the Madeleine barricade, and driven its defenders into the church, and slaughtered them there to the last man. But all that we only heard later.

While we were still gazing with wonder and regret on this spectacle, with little idea of the extent to which our capacities in both respects were yet to be tried, the line of stately buildings on the other side of the river opposite the Tuileries began to vomit thick black smoke and the same vicious tongues of flame, and we all watched spell-bound.

"The Devil is stirring," said Hugh between his teeth, and in his heart I knew he was fearing, as I was, that he might perchance come our way.

It was the strangest combination of opposites imaginable. Here on the roof we four stood as peacefully as though we had come up simply to take tea; while down below surged, and swarmed, and yelled, and screamed a nation gone mad. All round a vast semicircle in front of us the air was rent with artillery and the ceaseless crackle of musketry. Be-

hind us big guns roared. In front, again, the yellow flames and clouds of vicious black smoke were licking and hovering now in half a dozen different places; and over all the bright May sun shone, soft, and warm, and benignant, alike on the just and the unjust, on the Red-White-and-Blues and on the Reds, on victims and murderers, on the fair city and those who were working her undoing. And ever the crackling of the chassepots drew nearer towards the centre of the city, as point after point was yielded by the beaten Reds; and more than once did Myrtle growl in my ear, "Why the devil don't they go to pieces and scatter?" as if it was my hand that was keeping them together.

In such trepidation was I lest the fiery whirl should come our way, and involve us all in ruin, that had the power been given me at that moment I doubt not that I would have blotted the whole seething city out of existence, as one kicks to pieces the thoughtless fire that may kindle the bush.

Nevertheless, though we watched with horror, it was impossible not to watch. Terrible, horrible things were being done almost under our eyes. Their details were fortunately hidden, but what we did see fascinated us, and we did not go down even to eat. Our condition, in fact, was very similar to that of the baby rabbits when the snake is preparing them for its midday meal. The rabbits stare because they cannot help themselves, and so it was with us.

About nine o'clock at night flames, nearer to us than any yet, leaped up apparently to heaven.

"Good heavens!" said Hugh. "What is this?"

And presently we saw that it was the Tuileries, and—aliens though three of us were—not one of us but groaned inwardly at that most appalling sight.

The night was dark, without any moon. Fresh fires kept leaping out in front of us till the city seemed like the bubbling pit of a volcano. Whole streets seemed blazing in places. The black sky above pulsed like a cauldron of boiling copper. The very stars were lost in the red-hot glow and the whirling showers of sparks. Behind us and below us all was dark compared with that dreadful glow in front,

but the seething darkness covered deeds even more awful than any we saw.

In the early morning it seemed to us that the Louvre was burning; but when daylight came we saw that it was the Imperial Library and the Palais Royale.

And ever the cordon of crackling musketry closed in towards the centre of the town, and drew nearer and nearer to where we watched panting. The streets below were filled with an endless stream of fugitives fleeing from that deadly crackle. Guns went bumping past; now grinding the stones, now thudding heavily over fallen bodies. The Reds were beginning to go to pieces at last, and it was each man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost.

The girls had got coffee ready, and we went down in turn to take it. They were pale and heavy-eyed, and confessed that sleep had been impossible to them.

"How soon will it be over?" asked Marie pitifully.

"Very soon, dear," I said. "The troops are getting nearer every minute, and the others are all on the run."

And then there came a sudden hammering on our front gate down below, and, after a moment's hesitation and a scared glance into one another's startled eyes, I begged Freda to run up and ask Hugh to come down to me, and then I went downstairs apprehending some calamity.

I opened the little grille in the small gate.

"Vite, Monsieur, vite!" said an impatient voice. "It is I, Lepine." And I opened the gate.

Lepine sprang in, and closed it behind him. I imagined he had come for shelter. But it was not so.

"Monsieur le Capitaine who was in the Hospital—is he anything to you, Monsieur?" he panted.

"My brother-in-law," I said.

"He is among the hostages in Roquette. There is just a chance of saving him. Have you money?"

"Yes, plenty."

"They are murdering them in batches. My father sent me. There is a chance if we go quick."

Hugh came across the courtyard and joined us.

"I will get the money," I said, and ran back upstairs.

Marie met me at the top with fear in her eyes.

I thought it best to tell her the truth.

"Dearest, George is prisoner among the Reds. Young Lepine has come to tell me. He and his father will help me. I must go."

"Oh, Charles! Must you? Yes, yes, God forgive me! Go, my dear, and God with you!"

I kissed her. It might be for the last time. I knew it, and I think she knew it. Then I ran on and got Smartte's draft and all the gold I could lay hands on.

"Hugh will take care of you, my love, and I will be back presently and bring George with me."

I hoped that it might be so, but I felt by no means certain.

"Take care of them, Hugh," I said, as I wrung his hand.

"Trust me, my boy. Take care of yourself." And Lepine and I were outside the gate and speeding down the street.

"Curse them!" he hissed, as we crossed a corner of the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville and saw the coils of horrible black smoke beginning to curl up round the beautiful façade.

He led me swiftly along the Rue St. Antoine, then turned off to the left to avoid the barricades of the Place de la Bastille, across the canal, and so at last into the Rue de la Roquette. We were not molested. Every man was thinking only of himself, except indeed the few devil-possessed who thought still more of vengeance, and they were too busy to think of us.

We reached the prison. Lepine was well known. We were admitted without delay, and went straight to old M. Lepine's room.

"Ah, Monsieur," he said. "It is well. I think you may save him. These are terrible times. For me, I do not agree with them."

"I thank you for sending for me, M. Lepine. I have money here. How shall I use it?"

"For myself nothing," said the old man. "There is my

payment," and he pointed to his son. "But there are others, and them we must deal with. How much have you?"

"Ten thousand francs in a draft and about one thousand in gold."

"More than enough. I will take you to your friend and arrange the rest," and he led me away down the hopeless stone passages, and through iron section-doors, and finally unlocked a cell and showed me in, and went out.

George de Kerhuel sprang up from the camp-bed where he had been lying.

"Charles?"

"I've come to help, my boy, if I can. You are wounded?"

"Only a bruise," he said. "I was carrying a message from Vinoy to Macmahon when some fool shot my horse, and I went over head first and cracked my skull a bit. Cracked heads seem to run in the family. How is Marie?"

"Well. Quite recovered, but not strong yet, and horribly upset by all that's going on. Do you know they burnt the Tuileries last night——"

"Never!" he said, staring at me incredulously.

"It is true, and I think the Louvre, and the Palais Royale, and half Paris. The Hotel de Ville was just beginning as I passed."

"The utter, damned idiots," he said. "That is their last kick, anyhow."

"Yes, they're beaten, and they fire everything as they retire."

"It will cleanse the city of the dirty rats."

Here the door opened suddenly, and old Lepine came in with a bundle of clothing, a blouse, and a cap.

"Change, Monsieur, quickly, while I wait, and remember you are no longer an officer of the Government; you are George Keller, employé of the Postes and Telegraphes, imprisoned for declining to obey orders, and wounded by a shell. Keller was shot by mistake yesterday."

"It is not promotion," said George; but nevertheless

hastened to strip and rig himself in the less dangerous attire. M. Lepine took away his things, and we were alone again.

"Let me look at that head," I said. "It annoys me to see a head tied up like that."

There was a little water in a tin basin, and I proceeded to wash the broken head carefully, and was binding it up when there came a commotion in our corridor—the trampling of many feet, the opening of cell doors, a pause at each, and the shuffling drew nearer.

Then our door was flung open.

"Who is this?" asked a harsh voice, as the owner of it stepped inside and old Lepine followed him. Outside I got a glimpse of many others in the passage and heard the rattle of their arms. I went steadily on with my work.

"George Keller, employé of Postes and Telegraphes, detained by order of the Procureur, for contumacy," said Lepine.

"And the other?"

"A surgeon. Prisoner was wounded by a shell."

"Detain the surgeon also. We may want him."

The great man passed on to the next cell, and we little knew what we had escaped.

A small supply of food was brought in at mid-day. It was barely enough for one. We shared it between us.

We were not disturbed all the afternoon. But in the evening there came again that ominous shuffling of many feet in the corridor, the clink of arms, the opening and shutting of cell doors. Then it passed away, and we waited in silence for the next happening.

Presently old Lepine came in, bringing some more food.

"We must wait," he said, and I saw that his hand shook and his face was very pale. "It is not safe yet. They have just been shooting the archbishop and the priests. It is too much."

"I wish you could send word to my wife, M. Lepine, that I am all right, only temporarily detained."

But the old man shook his head. "It is impossible, Monsieur. Hear that!" as heavy volleys of musketry fell

on our ears. "The Versaillais are storming the Place de la Bastille, and lie now between us and your home."

Marie, then, was safe, and my heart was at rest on her account; but I knew she would be tormented on mine, and the thought left me no peace.

I begged Lepine to let me out, and I would take my own risk of getting through.

"They have trebled the guards here," he said, "and even if you got out the Versaillais would shoot you; they are sparing none. Wait quietly, Monsieur. I will do my best. It may be but a question of a day. Better one day in prison," he added sententiously, "than for ever in a grave."

I agreed with him, but was in despair at thought of the agony my absence would cause my wife.

The night passed heavily and slowly. The firing outside was incessant and drew constantly nearer. Such air as came into our cell was thick with smoke. George tried to make me take turn about on his bed. But I could not sleep, and so sat in his wooden chair all night, in great discomfort of body and greater still of mind.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN A HOT CORNER.

MORNING brought no alleviation of my distress. Lepine did not come; but there was another visitation from the shuffling feet and the rattling arms, and apparently many of our fellow-prisoners were taken away, and taken, as we knew, to be murdered in cold blood. A scanty provision of food and water was thrust into the cell as one flings scraps to a wild beast.

And then the end came, suddenly, and not at all as we had looked for it.

We heard a commotion in the passage, the hasty opening of cell doors, quick words followed by a buzz of talk. Our door was flung open in due course, and old Lepine thrust in his pale face, all twisted with excitement and beaded with sweat.

"Defend yourselves, Messieurs, as you can," he said quickly. "They are coming to murder you all. You must beat them off. The troops are not far away." And he hurried heavily to the next cell to set free its occupants on similar terms.

We ran out into the stone corridor and found all the cells emptying into it. Some of the prisoners had already broken chairs and tables to pieces, others held more formidable weapons in the legs and sides of their iron bedsteads. We favoured iron, and returned and wrenched the bedstead apart.

George took a hasty survey of the possibilities of defence. There was a massive iron gate across the corridor through which I had passed when coming in. He went up and shook it.

"It is locked," said a man near by.

"Which side?"

"This side. I saw the jailer lock it."

"So far good," said George coolly, "but they can rake us through the gate. Let us see if we can't do better." And he turned and ran down the corridor, I at his heels.

At the far end was a cross corridor uniting the wings of the building. Here a similar iron gate blocked the way, but it stood in the main passage, and was faced by the door of the first cell in the cross way.

"This is the place for us," he cried. "They cannot shoot round the corner." And then, to the buzzing throng in the passage, he shouted aloud, "This way, gentlemen, this way! Here is the only possible safety. The corner gives us the advantage."

They leaped to his idea in a moment, and swept in a wave to the cross corridor.

"M. Lepine!" he shouted. The old man was opening doors as fast as he could go. "Lock this door, if you please, and send all in here. Is there a similar door at the other end?"

"Si, si!" said the old man.

"Then hurry them in, and lock that too. You had better stop with us, or they will murder you for this business."

"Si, si!" said the old man, and presently another stream of released men came pouring through the opposite gate, and last of all old Lepine, who locked it and flung his keys on the floor, crying, "Voilà, Messieurs, I have done my best."

"And we shall not forget it," said George.

The rest recognised the soldier in him, in spite of blouse and cap. They saw at once that he had selected the only defensible position, and without any formal acclaim they deferred to him as leader.

We were a very mixed lot. In all I counted one hundred and twenty-five, but I found later that there were others in the cells which gave on to our cross corridor. Among us there were priests, soldiers, police officers, civilians; and all that I saw were armed with their self-provided weapons of one kind or another.

George was talking earnestly to M. Lepine, and presently he spoke aloud to the rest.

"My friends," he said, "we are here to save our lives, if that be possible. We cannot tell when the troops may be able to get into the prison. It may not be till to-morrow. That being so, it is essential that we make the most of what food and water we have, since we cannot get more. Will all who have any food bring it to me in this room?" indicating the centre cell of the corridor. "Charles," to me, "you and M. Lepine will go through these cells and bring me all you can find of either food or water."

Some had crammed the remains of their rations into their pockets, and now produced and handed them over. M. Lepine and I set out on our round. We found water in many of the cells, but not much food.

"We shall be very short if we have to wait any length of time for our friends," said George, when the total was before him. "We must go on short rations at once."

He explained the position to the rest, and no dissentient voice was raised.

"Better to starve for a chance of life than be shot like a dog with a full belly," said a grim old sergeant of police.

"I thank you," said George. "That is the spirit. I pledge my word that all shall share alike."

And then silence fell on us all, as we heard the iron gate away up the corridor shaken vigorously and the hum of many voices behind it.

But shaking did no good, and they shouted for Lepine to come and open it, not at all understanding what had happened. While they were still nonplussed what to do, George bethought him how to strengthen our own defences.

"Bring out enough bedsteads," he cried, "to fill those spaces over against the gates. Then, if they force the gates, we can beat them down as they wriggle through the bedsteads." And in a moment the bedsteads were trundling along to each end of the corridor, and were stacked there so that ingress was next to impossible.

The murderous crew saw them and understood that they

were baulked of their prey, for the time being at all events. They howled down the bare space between the gates like a pack of wolves, and then without more ado proceeded to break the first gates down. This took time, and long before they came pouring along the corridor our barricade was as strong as we could make it. It seemed to me that a dozen determined men with clubs, at the side of those bedsteads, could hold the position for ever—or, at all events, until they starved.

The Reds howled through our gates, at the doors of the cells opposite, at the bristling bedsteads. They could see nothing else. They fired a useless shot or two, but, as George had said, they could not shoot round the corner, and we were as safe from them as stone walls and iron gates and bedstead barricades could make us.

They found at last that howls and curses broke none of our bones and affected us not at all. They tried cajolery. If we would only come out, we were free to go where we would. On their word of honour!

Even their word of honour did not move us to trust ourselves to their tender mercies, and, leaving a cursing guard at our impregnable gates, the chiefs retired to confer.

We heard the results presently in much bustling and shuffling and bearing of burdens, which were jammed against and through the bars of the gates—bedding from the adjoining cells. They fired their piles, and the smoke came pouring in rolls into our corridor. We set all the cell doors open, and it poured through and out of the gratings. When the fires burned down the position was unchanged as far as we were concerned—increase of anger and further blasphemies on their part.

The hours strained slowly through the close-knit tangle of our anxieties, every faculty at full stretch, every nerve on the rack. Time seemed to have stopped, and left us in hell.

I was sitting on the floor alongside George when someone fell over my feet in the dark, and asked, "Is M. the Gaoler here?" and by the voice I judged it to be one of the priests.

"I am here," said old Lepine from the other side. "What do you want?"

"Can you tell us, sir, what has become of Monseigneur D'Arboy?"—the good archbishop beloved by all who knew him. "We are much concerned for his safety."

"He is safe, Monsieur," began the warder, after a moment's hesitation.

"Dieu merci!"

"He is dead," said the old man. "They took him out into the grounds there last night, and shot him against the wall."

"May God have mercy on their souls!" said the voice, and passed silently away to break the news to the rest.

It must have been close on midnight when there came a heavy rumbling along the passage, and a chorus of triumphant shouts from the besiegers.

"They have got up a small field-piece," said George. "Run out a few more bedsteads and have them handy. A dozen of you stand by with clubs when they fire."

The discharge bellowed like thunder in the confined space of the corridor. The iron gates bulged and collapsed; the bedsteads twisted themselves into fantastic puzzles. The door of the opposite cell flew open and our corridor was full of powder smoke. All this we heard. It was quite dark, and we could see nothing till the gun spoke again. Then two men came leaping onto the rickety barricade. They were beaten into pulp, with blind flailings of table legs and lengths of bedstead, before their feet were free of the puzzles down below. The rest drew back.

"Fling on those other bedsteads," from George. They crashed down on the dead men, and our defences were as safe as before.

Half a dozen times they fired the gun, first at one side, then round at the other; but the only result was an increase in the iron tangle that fenced us from them. No more of them found courage to attempt the passage.

Then, after a pause, something came jerking in and rolled spitting along the floor—a grenade. It burst with a loud

explosion and wounded three of our men. It was impossible to attend to them in the dark. I got them into a cell, and told them to sit down and I would see to them in the morning. Two more grenades came in. But we were all ready for them, and took cover in the cells the moment we heard them coming.

"Tables!" cried George, and built up a wooden breastwork with them, so that the next grenade fell back on to the bedsteads and did more damage outside than in.

None of us attempted sleep that night. After the repulse of the grenadiers, our leader served out to each man who came for it a meagre ration of bread and water, and intimated that about four similar doles would have to last us till rescue came. I for one devoutly hoped it would come soon, for our meal was barely a mouthful, and I had come to the fight with an empty stomach.

The enemy grew tired of the one-sided game at last, and left us in peace. Outside, the crash and crackle of the chassepots went on incessantly, and the sound was encouraging, though we would have liked it nearer still.

As soon as it was light I hurried to the wounded men. Two were soldiers. Their wounds were not of much account. Nasty flesh wounds, which would be all right in a fortnight.

The third was a priest. He was propped in the angle of the wall with his eyes closed. I asked him where he was hurt. He took his hand from his side without opening his eyes, and disclosed a ghastly hole. It explained the slightness of the other men's wounds, this one had received the larger share. I bound him up, but I knew it was useless. Nothing could save him, though he might live through the day.

But, as I worked at him, first an idea glimmered on me, then it grew into a certainty, and swept me with the force of a revelation. I got up and went to George, who, now that it was daylight and traps and stratagems could be seen, was lying on a bed asleep.

I shook him by the shoulder, and he sat up.

"Coming again?" he asked, instantly wide awake.

"No. Come with me, George. There is someone here you know."

"Who is it?" and he threw his feet to the floor and followed me.

"He is one of the wounded by the grenade last night," I said, as we stood over the priest. "Do you know him?"

He looked down at the man, and said, "No, I don't think so. Who does he say he is?"

"He has not spoken," I said. "Look again!"

He glanced sharply at me, as though to say that this was no time for conundrums; then fell to examining the priest's face again.

"Mon dieu!" he said with a start at last. "Yes, it is he. He is much changed."

There was no doubt about it. It was M. Lesieur, M. le Curé, though it was indeed difficult at first to trace any likeness between this sunken-faced, prison-worn, bearded and bewhiskered and generally dishevelled man and the stout, genial, well-fed ecclesiastic for whom we had sought high and low.

George's eyes blazed as he stood over him. He looked as if he would shake out of him all he wanted to know.

"Will he recover?" he asked in a low voice.

I shook my head. "He may last the day—hardly more. His side is blown to pieces."

His lips tightened savagely. The key to the mystery of Querhoal was like to slip through our fingers, after all.

He knelt suddenly by the Curé's side.

"M. le Curé," he said, "I know you. You know me. You are dying. You can tell me much that I desire to know. How came my father at Querhoal? I beg of you to tell me before you go."

But, for any sign he made, the wounded man might never have heard his voice.

"Look you," said George again, a trifle more sharply. "M. de Querhoal is dead. Raoul is dead. My father is restored to us and to his right mind. How came he to be

locked up there all his life? You are dying, man," he said, angry at the impassiveness of the other. "Why burden your soul unnecessarily?"

But the other gave no sign of having heard him.

"Tell me before you go," said George once more and very urgently, "and, as far as I am concerned, I will forgive you the wrong done and will pray God to rest your soul. Go without telling me, and I will never cease to curse you while I live."

But it was all of no avail. The sunken face remained unmoved as if carved in wood.

I half expected an angry outburst from George. But he rose from his knees in silence and beckoned me away.

"He will not speak. But I had to ask him. Will he ramble towards the end?"

"Impossible to say. He may simply drop away without a sign. He is bleeding to death, and beyond assistance."

"Keep close to him, Charles, and call me when you see signs of the end. He might drop words that would enlighten us."

"How is it with our brother, Monsieur?" asked one of the other priests.

"He is dying."

"I will offer him absolution," and he crossed to the dying man and knelt quietly by his side. I slipped softly to one side, where M. Lesieur would not see me if he opened his eyes.

The priest spoke softly to him. The Curé opened his eyes for one quick look at him, then closed them as before and remained silent. He feared to be tricked. The other looked in truth no more like a priest than he did himself. He would not trust him, and to all that the other said he remained as impervious as a stone. His self-command, in spite of his agonies and ebbing strength, was admirable—if only it had been for God, and not for the Devil. This man was made of the stuff that martyrs are made of, and I knew that he would never speak.

The enemy at our gates had apparently exhausted his

ingenuity. We breakfasted in peace on bread and water, and waited all day for a renewal of the attack, but none came. A strong guard was posted in each wing corridor, and we waited and they waited, and nothing came of it all; and outside the musketry crashed without ceasing. The Reds were evidently making a bigger fight of it here than they had done in any other parts of the city. And at times we said to one another that the firing was certainly nearer. We desired it so earnestly, it meant life to us. And then the wind would lull or shift, and it sounded further away again, and our hearts sank. But we were alive where death had claimed so many, and we would not give up hope. So we nibbled our bread and sipped our water, and told ourselves it could not be very much longer.

Several times during the day I offered the dying man water, but his lips were tight sealed and he would not open them, though he must have been suffering agonies of thirst. Just as the slow sun was setting I saw the change I knew so well by this time come over his face. I begged that other priest who stood near, still hoping to be of use at the last, to fetch George, and he was by my side in an instant.

He made one more effort.

"M. Lesieur! There is time still. Speak, and go home with a clear conscience."

But the Curé's only answer was a tired straightening of the body and a settling down to rest, and his head fell back against the wall.

"He is gone," I said.

His jaw dropped slowly and blood ran from his mouth, and, stooping, I saw that his teeth had been clenched so firmly on his tongue that it was almost bitten through.

A martyr in very truth, but not of God.

We were still regarding him regretfully, and not without bitterness—for his silence had left a mystery behind which was not likely ever to be dissipated now—when a turmoil in the corridors at both ends of our fortress called us once more to the fray.

We were barely in time to see what happened. There was a wild scrambling among our piled-up bedsteads. The

rampart of tables was overthrown, and at each end half a dozen men came tumbling in on us. Over their heads grenades came hurtling in as fast as they could be thrown. I saw at least a dozen spitting about the floor at once, and dived into the nearest cell. Most of our men took cover, and the new comers got the worst of it as one by one the devilish little machines burst and sent their fragments flying all over the place.

"Tables here!" roared George, as he sprang out of hiding, and glad I was to hear his voice. "Down with those fools! More tables here! Pile them up!" and he thrashed away furiously at any head that showed round the corner of the gate, and then sent his bedstead leg whirling among the throng outside, as he caught sight of an arm about to fling a grenade. There was a fall and a backward rush and a blasphemous outburst. But our rampart of tables was up again before they recovered. At the other end of the corridor old Sergeant Cornu was playing the same game. In the middle a fierce fight was going on between our people and the dozen or so who had entered. But we were near ten to one. It was our lives or theirs, and it was very soon over. We leaned against the walls elate, and coughed up the smoke of the bombs.

It was marvellous that men should have been found mad enough for such a venture, but a word from old Lepine explained it. He looked at the bodies as they were being flung into the furthest cell, and said, "They are détenus from the other wing. That"—pointing to one who was just in transit—"is Duclos, the murderer of old Madame Sainton. This"—touching another with his foot—"is one Collet, murderer also. They have released them on condition of attacking us."

"And omitted to tell them what to expect," said George.

From the outside they tried to thrust down our screen with poles to make way for more grenades. We built a second barrier behind; and they gave it up, and for a time left us in peace.

Before it grew quite dark George divided the last of the bread among us. There was still a little water left after

everyone had had a drink. He tried to put some heart into us with hopeful words, and I bound up splinter wounds wherever I found them. But, speaking for myself, my heart was of the heaviest. The Government troops would undoubtedly come sooner or later. Greatly I feared it would be later, and that they would only find what the fiends in the corridors might choose to leave of us, which would probably not be of much use to anybody, and still less sightly.

The venom of their hatred for us was extraordinary. It could not have been surpassed had we been the actual heads of the Government, whereas we were in fact a most ordinary lot of nobodies. I can only account for it by the supposition that they had all gone mad, and that the human in them had given place to the animal. Like maddened beasts, blinded to their own risks, they ran amok to satisfy their own wild passions.

We were lying and sitting about the floor, in darkness and much desperation, with the sound of the distant fighting outside in our ears, when a tumult in the corridors warned us of a further attack, and I wondered in a dull way, for I was very tired, what course it would take this time.

From the sounds, they were bringing up some new instrument of destruction. The corridor was full of rumblings and pantings. There were voices outside the gratings also, but we could make out nothing of what was going on. Then there came the sound of hammering in the corridor, and presently the stone slabs beneath our feet grew sticky and slippery, and by feel and smell we knew they were emptying kegs of petroleum through our defences. It seemed to me that we stood a very fair chance of being roasted where we stood.

But there were men of resource among us.

"Mop it up with the bedding," suggested one.

"Good!" said George. "Beds here, quick! Soak up all you can. The more you pick up the less there'll be to burn," and the mattresses were swabbing up the slimy stuff before he had done speaking.

The smell of petroleum gives me nausea to this day. As

the beds grew sodden with it we dragged them away to one of the middle inside cells and piled them in, one on top of the other, and we were soon most of us as well soaked as they were. If any of us by chance caught fire, it would be a case of Nero's torches with us! Our would-be cooks had emptied all their kegs, but still they waited, and we heard the murmur of voices in the prison grounds. Then a weird light shone in on us from the outside, and flames and smoke rushed up against the gratings, and at the same moment lights flashed in the corridors, and flames came snaking swiftly in along the floor, and we stood back in much trepidation to watch the effect.

The spaces at each end of the corridor filled by our tangle of bedsteads became roaring furnaces in a moment, and the filthy black smoke rolled round us in clouds. Our table ramparts caught fire and blazed furiously. The flames came licking along the floor in search of the sodden mattresses. They had little to feed upon, however, and did not amount to much, since they covered no more than twenty feet or so at each end of our refuge. We kept warily out of reach, lest our oil-soaked persons should add fuel to the fire. It was surely a strange sight. The flames lit up the place and made it as light as day. The whole hundred and twenty of us huddled together into as small a space as possible, with a burning fiery furnace at either side, and another forking at us through the gratings of the front cells. The roof was a dense rolling cloud of smoke, which set us all coughing and choking, and our faces, where they were not black with our labours, were white with exhaustion and despair. There was still one line of temporary retreat open to us—the inner cells, but with one or two exceptions the fascination of the flames held us face to face with them, and even those who had slipped away kept coming back to see if the end was any nearer.

The flames in the corners seemed dying down. Those along the floor had burnt themselves out. Our hopes revived. Then of a sudden the corner flames leapt up to the roof. Their corners were not large enough to hold them, and they came flowing in a long vicious stream of fire down

the corridor towards us. The fiends in the outer corridors were feeding the fire in some extraordinary way to such an extent that the furnaces overflowed, and their superfluity was intended for our undoing, and came very near to it. Many of our number had broken off into the rear cells, where the grilles still admitted fresh air. George had given the word for the rest to follow and close the doors, when above and through the roaring flames a new sound caught our ears.

God spoke to the men of old in a voice of thunder. He spoke to us that night in the rattling thunder of the chasse-pots, close under the building at last—and they sang of safety and deliverance from a horrible death.

Half a dozen men sprang across to the outer cells and swarmed up to the grilles, regardless of flames and smoke, and shouted in voices that told their own story:

"A nous, à nous! They are roasting us!"

A great shout answered them. We all heard it. In the sudden switch from death to life strong men fell on one another's necks and kissed and cried, and comported themselves generally as men may when fiery Death has licked their faces and then passed by.

One man dancing back across the corridor, like a thing bereft of sense at the prospect of life, caught fire, and we fell on him and beat death off with our oil-soaked hands—which is a desperate thing to do, and some of us carried the hall-mark of that day's work for many a day to come.

But the flames had sunk again as the feeders fled, and soon it was water instead of oil that came pumping and hissing, and finally splashing in—oh, most heavenly sound! the cold splashing of water!—hissing and splashing over the furnaces at each end of the corridor. The red-hot tangle of twisted bedsteads squirmed and blackened, the white steam rose in clouds, the water flowed in dirty heavenly streams over the floor, driving the blazing oil in front of it, the oil spluttered and went out, and we were saved.

What a cheer they gave us, those Gabriels of the new life!—hard-faced, tight-lipped men, with the marks of their six days' street-fighting all over them, and the lust of blood

in their blood-shot eyes. But to us they were angels of light, and we fell upon them and embraced them as if they had come straight from heaven.

But every man's work was waiting for him that night, and from saviours they turned to slaughterers again the moment they saw us free. They had no time for idle congratulations. The rats were on the run, and their work was to kill as many as possible. They dropped their pumps and buckets, and picked up their guns, and rushed away to the red work of extermination. And we, the redeemed, streamed out into the night and scattered to the safest places we could think of.

George and I hurried off to carry our own good news to the hearts that we knew must be breaking for us.

The ghastly sights that started out at us from the flickering darkness will never leave us. Sure Dante in his circles came upon no more woful horrors.

Everywhere blood and fire, and the stark bodies of men and women and children, and of the houses they had lived in. By the leaping flames of the holocaust we picked precarious passage down the Rue de la Roquette; scrambled through the breached barricade, where the bodies were still warm and limp, into the Place de la Bastille, where they lay in heaps; out through the barricade facing the Rue St. Antoine, where many houses were burning, and the sides of them and the sidewalks were splashed with blood; across the great blank space where the charred husk of the Hôtel de Ville was still smoking; and so home, and very grateful we were to find the house still standing.

We hammered on the door, and our hearts seemed to beat louder than our fists—these were times of such dreadful possibilities. But the door opened cautiously at last, and Hugh Myrtle greeted us with a great glad shout, and we knew that all was well.

I left the others to follow, and went up the stairs four at a time; and at the top the sweetest face in all the world welcomed me back to life with a smile of inexpressible thankfulness.

CHAPTER XL.

SEVERAL NEW FATHERS.

JUST a week later we were in the diligence, grinding along the high road between Caulnes and Dinan as fast as two sturdy Breton horses could carry us—Marie, George, and I. Hugh and Freda were away to Cassel to interview papa. And the long plains of Brittany, with the orchards shedding their bloom like showers of belated snow round red-roofed hamlets and little pointed spires, and the serried rows of poplars swaying stately in the breeze, and the lush meadows where contemplative cattle whisked spasmodic tails in shallow brown streams, seemed to us like the plains of heaven. So very different from that charred and blood-sprinkled city of palaces from which we had come.

"They've been going a bit crazy là-bas," remarked old Pinson the driver, meaning thereby Paris.

"Yes," we said, "they've been going a bit crazy."

"But we're rid of those pigs of Prussians, anyhow," he said, with the manner of one who defied contradiction.

We acknowledged that he was right. We were rid of those pigs of Prussians, anyhow.

"And now, without doubt, we've got to pay the bill."

That, too, we did not dispute.

"Nom d'un chien! and it's we poor devils who have to pay it!"

Père Pinson's portion would not go a great way towards the liquidation of the bill, but I doubt if we would have raised a dissenting finger if he had accused us of being Prussians ourselves, which he knew a great deal better than to do. We wanted peace, peace for the rest of our lives and after, for we knew of our own knowledge what war meant, and there is no power on earth that makes so strongly for peace as the actual, intimate, personal knowledge of war.

We had wired the news of our coming from Versailles, and they were all at the office to meet us, and Père Pinson

drove up the street with so mighty a whip-cracking that all the passers-by turned to wonder whom he had got on board.

My mother looked younger and handsomer than ever I had thought to see her. I had to ask myself if it was possible that this old, old man of many experiences could be that youthful lady's son.

Elrode Smartte was there, with his right sleeve looped up and a slight limp in the right leg, but so jubilantly happy that my heart went out to him afresh for his cordiality.

"Just brought down your leg for you to look at, my boy," was his greeting. "It's a leg any man might be proud of." And he stuck it out for my inspection.

Madame de Kerhuel was there, gravely happy, but with the wave-marks of trouble very plainly visible in her face. But her hand-clasp and welcome were of the warmest, and her eyes were very bright as she led us—Marie's hand and mine in one of her hands, and George's in the other—to the grave, bent man who stood watching us all with much interest but no recognition.

"Godefroi," she said, with that soft intonation which was his peculiar privilege, "this is George, our son," and the two men looked for a moment into one another's eyes, and then, French fashion, embraced one another.

"And this is our dear Marie," and the father's eyes filled suddenly with new light, as he found in the sweet shy face a near link with the past which was his own. He embraced her warmly, and his eyes wandered constantly back to her, and lingered on her as though they found themselves more at home there than anywhere else. Me, too, he welcomed warmly, as one receives a stranger with whom one desires to be friendly. But I noticed that he was a silent man, and I was not surprised at it.

But there were other surprises in store for me.

"Well, Charles, my son," said Smartte, as we strolled towards our house, George with his father, and Marie between the two ladies, "you have done well, very well, and I am pleased with you. My conscience, boy, just suppose we had never met! Life on this little planet is the strangest

hit-and-miss business that ever was. A quarter of an hour may change a man's whole life."

"You and I have seen less than that stop it altogether."

"That's so. Less than no time does it, and neither of 'em knows anything about it. One pulls a trigger at a mob half a mile away, and the other gets a bullet from he doesn't know where. It's the devil's own game. You've had enough of it, I reckon."

"More than enough. A little goes a long way. You seem fairly fit again, Rode."

"Fit! Never was fitter in my life, and never thought to be so happy in this crooked little world; and all your doing, my boy. You've picked out a plum yourself," he said, after a pause. "I congratulate you. She's a sweet-looking girl, and worth all your trouble." Another pause, and I saw him glance sideways at me, and then, "Well—and what have you got to say about it? Not disappointed, I hope?" And he looked a trifle anxious.

"Disappointed?" I said. "What, with my wife——"

"With *your* wife?" he shouted. "Man alive! Do you mean to say you never got our letters?"

"We've had no letters for eight weeks."

"Whoop!" and he dashed at the ladies in front. "Kitty, they know nothing about it," and he grabbed my mother by the arm and led her back to me, all rosy with confusion, while the wondering natives grinned to one another, "How drole they are, these English, par exemple."

"Allow me," said Smartte, enjoying himself exceedingly. "You have not been properly introduced, you two. You had no right to speak to one another. Mr. Charles Glyn—Mrs. Elrode E. Smartte. You have met before, I believe. I hope you will be good friends."

"Truly?" I asked. "Or is it only his fun?"

"Truly, my dear!" said my mother, still rosy red, but looking very happy and still younger than before. "And we have to thank you for it."

"He's the very best fellow in the world," I said, "and I am heartily glad you have come together. What a day

this is! I knew Marie was finding practically a new father, but I certainly had no idea I was in the same lucky boat. My dear dad, I adopt you on the spot."

"I adopted you, my son," he said solemnly, "on a very much less pleasant spot. I judge a man by his eyes, and I cottoned on to yours as soon as I saw them. If I knew the man that fired that shell that brought me here, I'd give him an annuity."

We passed the little house I knew so well, and turned into a very much finer one, where Joséphine Druot stood on the top step full of smiles and congratulations, and behind her in the front room a breakfast awaited us that made our mouths water.

"How does that compare with stewed horse, Colonel?" asked Smartte, as he heaped George's plate with a second serving of white spring chicken and delicate fringed salad.

"I shall never mount a horse again, I fear, without thinking how much better he is to ride than to eat," said George. "But there's one thing a shade worse than horse to eat."

"What's that?" asked Smartte. "Mule?"

"No horse," said George with extreme gravity. "There have been times when I have been glad even of horse. I remember in one of the later sorties some artillery horses were shot close to us, and my men broke ranks under fire to cut chunks out of them, and ate them raw. It was a bitter, bad time. Thank Heaven, it's past, and some of us are left alive."

"Will you go back?" asked Smartte.

"Yes, I shall go back. They want me, and there is a life's work to be done there in reorganising things."

"Well, I hope you'll start on a good square base this time. Things were very queer before."

"We have been sifted with steel and purged with fire," said George. "I think things will be better now. The price has been a heavy one; but we have paid it, and we start clear."

Our good friend M. Renel came in after breakfast.

Smartte told me he had wanted him to join us at it, but the good little pastor's native modesty would not permit him to obtrude to such an extent on our family meeting. His joy at our safe return was full and deep, and our encomiums on his friend M. Dellieu gave him the utmost satisfaction.

"You have been led by strange and wonderful paths," he said, as he stood on the side-walk holding Marie's hand and mine in his, before we joined her father and mother in the carriage that was to take us to Kerhuel, "but the end is peace. For which God be thanked!"

The carriage was a new one, large and roomy and well hung, and we bowled along between the poplars at a great pace. It suited George's humour to go on the box seat, though we could have found room for him inside.

I asked Madame where and how Godefroi was.

"He is in Poitou at the moment, looking after some matters there," she said, and Marie looked up at her quickly.

"Ah, you did not know," said Madame. "He died"—referring to her father—"just a month ago, and Godefroi is relieving me of most of the business matters."

M. de Kerhuel was, as I have said, very silent, and yet, under all the circumstances, I could not say strangely silent. He sat now enjoying the easy swing of the carriage, the sweet soft air and the sunshine, the fields and the trees. One could see by his face how pleasant these things were to him, but he never once opened his mouth between Dinan and Kerhuel.

And that, I found by experience, was his habit. He had been so long out of the world that he had as yet hardly got used to being in it again. To all intents and purposes he had been dead for eighteen years. In silence he found escape from slips and anachronisms which to himself would doubtless have been painful, even though they were received with the tenderest sympathy by those who loved him.

Beyond the slight bowing of his figure, and the undue ageing of his looks, this garment of silence was the only outward reminder of the tragedy in which he had figured.

Marie and I settled down quietly for a time at Kerhuel,

and by slow degrees I grew into very friendly terms with my father-in-law, and came to like and respect him much.

After a time he would talk to me as he would talk to no one else, and I think that he found some relief therein. He knew that as a doctor I would understand him and his case, and he came to know that as a son I bore him a very deep affection.

How often, sitting there with our cigars in the tinkle of the weir, have we discussed that great mystery of which he had been the victim. I think he spoke of it to no other person. But with me he discussed it fully and freely, and we tried our best to lift the veil and come at the meaning of it.

At his urgent request I sought light on the subject from any and every source—from Madame, from M. Renel, from the old servants—the possible sources of information were indeed neither far to seek nor difficult to tap. But the holders of the actual keys to the mystery were all gone, and all by sudden and violent deaths, and their knowledge went with them.

We never have learnt the meaning of it. But, as the result of my many discussions with M. de Kerhuel and my inquiries on his behalf, and a careful turning over and piecing together of these things in my mind, we arrived at a possible explanation. As a possible explanation only do I offer it. The true and full reason why Godefroi de Kerhuel was for eighteen years detained a prisoner, in squalor and misery, in the Château of Querhoal, within a stone's throw of his own home and wife and children who thought him dead, is one of those hidden things of this world which only the opening of the books up above will make plain.

Twenty-five years before this, M. Lesieur arrived in Dinan, Jesuit to the core and with his way to make in the world. The two chief objects to be attained—let us do him every justice, and say for his Church and not for himself—were money and power, either or both. The two things have become to all intents and purposes identical, whence the Devil reaps a plenteous harvest.

M. Lesieur found Godefroi de Kerhuel the elder, a widower with one son little Godefroi, and Raoul de Querhoal the elder both suitors for the hand of Mlle. Destournelles, heiress to large estates in Poitou, by descent a Huguenot, by religion a Protestant, and so outside the sphere of his influence.

The de Querhoals were ever a wild, headstrong race, and the old Count and his son showed no signs of being more amenable to priestly guidance than their forbears. De Kerhuel, on the other hand, was a good Catholic and of an easy-going and amiable disposition. Lesieur's good wishes were therefore doubtless with the latter, though he was powerless to assist either one or the other.

De Kerhuel won the heiress, and they were married, M. le Curé attending to the interests of the Church as regards the future disposition of the property, so far as that was possible when everything depended on children yet unborn.

De Querhoal departed, married, returned a year later with his son Raoul, whose mother had died in giving him birth, and then rambled off into far-away countries, and was absent for some three or four years.

M. Lesieur's influence, then, was strong at Kerhuel, but less strong at Querhoal, where priestly influence was at a discount.

When Raoul de Querhoal returned from his wanderings there were at Kerhuel three children born of Godefroi's second marriage.

All that is history. Now we pass into the wider realm of supposition.

Raoul's passion for Godefroi's wife revived in all its force at sight of her. He lived a retired life at the Château, shooting, fishing, and wandering in the woods, possibly lying at times in the bushes on the river bank above the weir, and watching with envious eyes the happy family life at Kerhuel, and greatly breaking the tenth commandment.

To a Querhoal so situated nothing was impossible.

Godefroi de Kerhuel, driving home from the market at Caulnes one foggy night, with his servant Jean Dobain be-

side him, and his dog Bar running between the wheels, finds himself nearly in the river. While continuing his journey at a cautious walk, a murderous blow from behind knocks him senseless, a second blow fells his companion, and Raoul de Querhoal, swinging one of the relics of his travels in his hand, drops back into the road satisfied with his work. All he has to do now is to dispose of the bodies, and in due time Godefroi's wife may be his.

He is about to drive horse and cart and its dreadful contents over the steep river bank, when a hand arrests him, and to his horror M. le Curé is at his side.

What passed between them none shall say. But we can see the results. Jean Dobain's body is found many days afterwards in St. Malo bay, bruised out of recognition, but, by reason of certain belongings of Godefroi's found upon it, is taken for his master's, and as such is buried at Dinan; and the widow is free to marry again, if she can be prevailed upon to do so.

Why, then, the change of bodies? Why was the work not finished?

Because Godefroi de Kerhuel, senseless, with his skull beaten in, was not dead. And M. le Curé, with lightning forethought, saw more personal advantage in keeping him alive than in becoming accessory to his murder. So far the Curé was guiltless—unless, indeed, he could have restrained the murderer before he struck those fatal blows. We may give him the benefit of the doubt.

But now his keen wits were at work. Here was broth, not of his brewing, which he could stir to advantage. De Querhoal was his, body and soul, from that night forth. He would have de Kerhuel too, and so hold all the trumps. And in any case he could not, as a priest of Mother Church, stand by and permit murder. But to keep his hold on De Querhoal he must assist him to cover up his crime. That his elastic conscience would permit—the end justifies the means. Jean Dobain's body is clothed to the last minutest detail in Godefroi's garments and ornaments, possibly the face is made unrecognisable. Then cart, horse, and body

are launched into the river. Bar, the dog, has run howling off into the fog, and finds his way home. Godefroi de Kerhuel is conveyed by the two men to the Château, and there kept prisoner. When he recovers from the outward effects of the onslaught his brain is found to be injured. Raoul's deed elevates the aspiring Curé to supreme power at Querhoal, and leaves him a card in reserve for Kerhuel if he should ever care to play it.

A dangerous game!—a very dangerous game, but one that might well appeal to such a mind. And then, as a simple matter of humanity—shall he consign Raoul to the guillotine? And Madame surely is happier as a widow than encumbered with a husband whose brain is at fault, and who is at times—in fact, always at sight of a priestly robe—dangerously savage. The lives of Madame and the children would not be safe for a moment if he were free, and the care of such a case would bow her life to the ground. Let the author of the injury bear the brunt of it—and let M. le Curé rule the roost.

If Raoul in time succeeds in winning Madame de Kerhuel, M. le Curé holds them all in the hollow of his hand. The power is his, he can dictate his own terms by threatening disclosures; the money will follow. Raoul, undoubtedly with the Curé's consent, did his best to win Madame. But, as we know, she would have none of him. What they would have done with M. de Kerhuel had he succeeded, I do not venture to say. That would probably have depended on the terms Raoul made with M. le Curé.

Time passed on. Raoul at last gave the matter up as a bad job and went away on his travels again, and finally got killed at Solferino, but it was too late now to return the injured man to his home. M. le Curé's reputation would suffer, as well as that of the house of Querhoal. And so he was kept prisoner in the Château, and the crime of that foggy night by the river spread out over eighteen years, and might never have been revealed but for the accident of the fire.

That is the explanation we finally arrived at of the

mystery of Querhoal. And, since M. Lesieur chose to die in La Roquette, biting his tongue through lest it should wag when his will failed him, I fear no other explanation will ever be forthcoming.

A few days after we reached Kerhuel I received the following telegram from Cassel:—

"Papa says yes.—Freda—Hugh."

To which we replied:—

"God bless you.—Marie—Charles."

And so, in the Dust of the Mills, the White Flowers blossomed.

And they have never ceased to flourish, for their roots strike down to the eternal springs.

For—

The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small,
So soft and slow the great wheels go, they scarcely move at all;
But the souls of men fall into them and are powdered into dust,
And in the dust grow sweet white flowers,—Love,—Hope,—Trust.

THE END.

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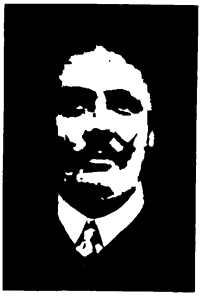

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